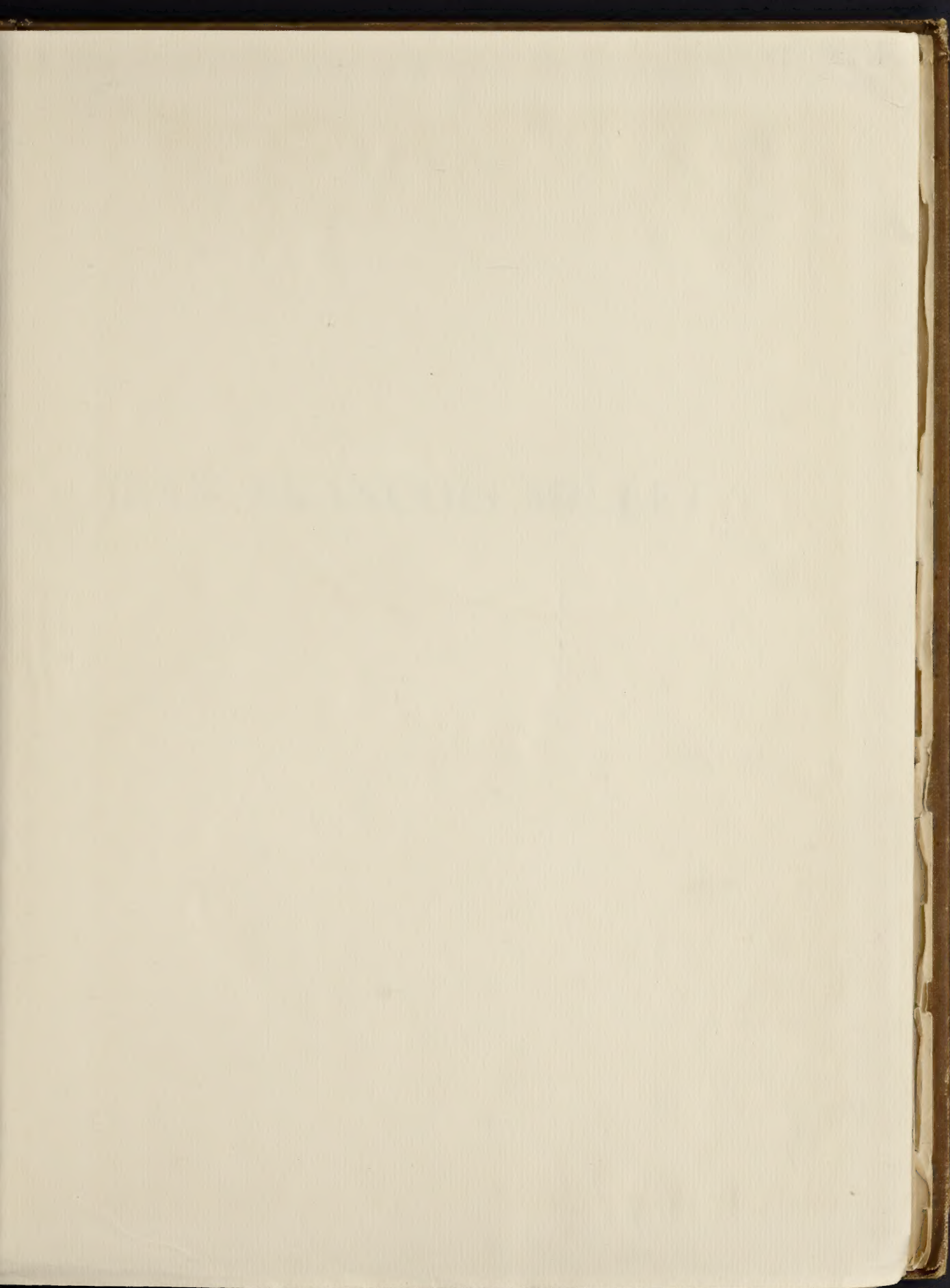








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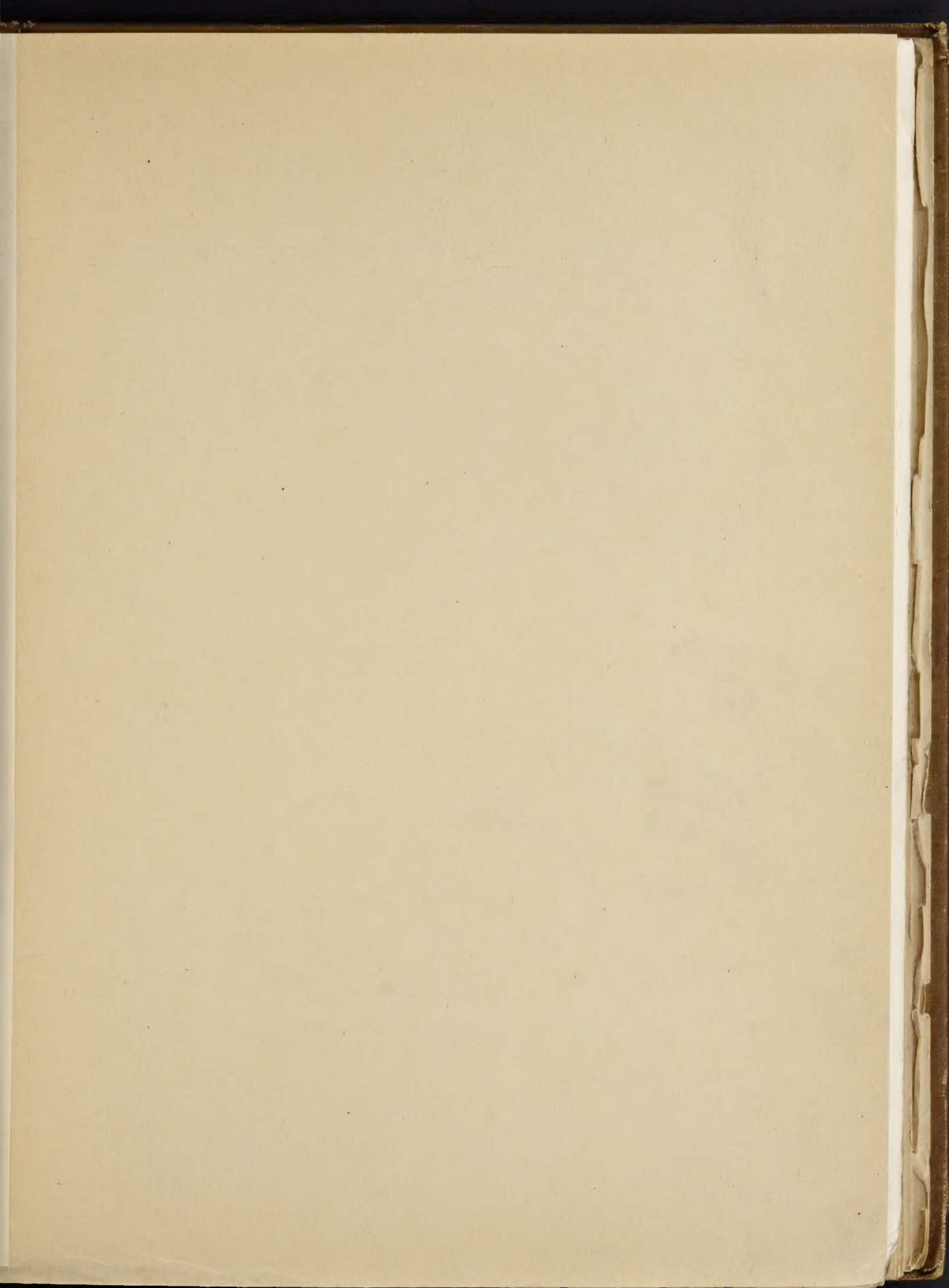


JEAN FRANÇOIS MILLET

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*No. 274.*









THE DRAWINGS OF  
THE ANGELUS  
JEAN FRANÇOIS  
MILLET

WITH  
FIFTY FACSIMILE REPRODUCTIONS OF  
THE MASTER'S WORK

AND AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY BY  
LÉONCE BÉNÉDITE

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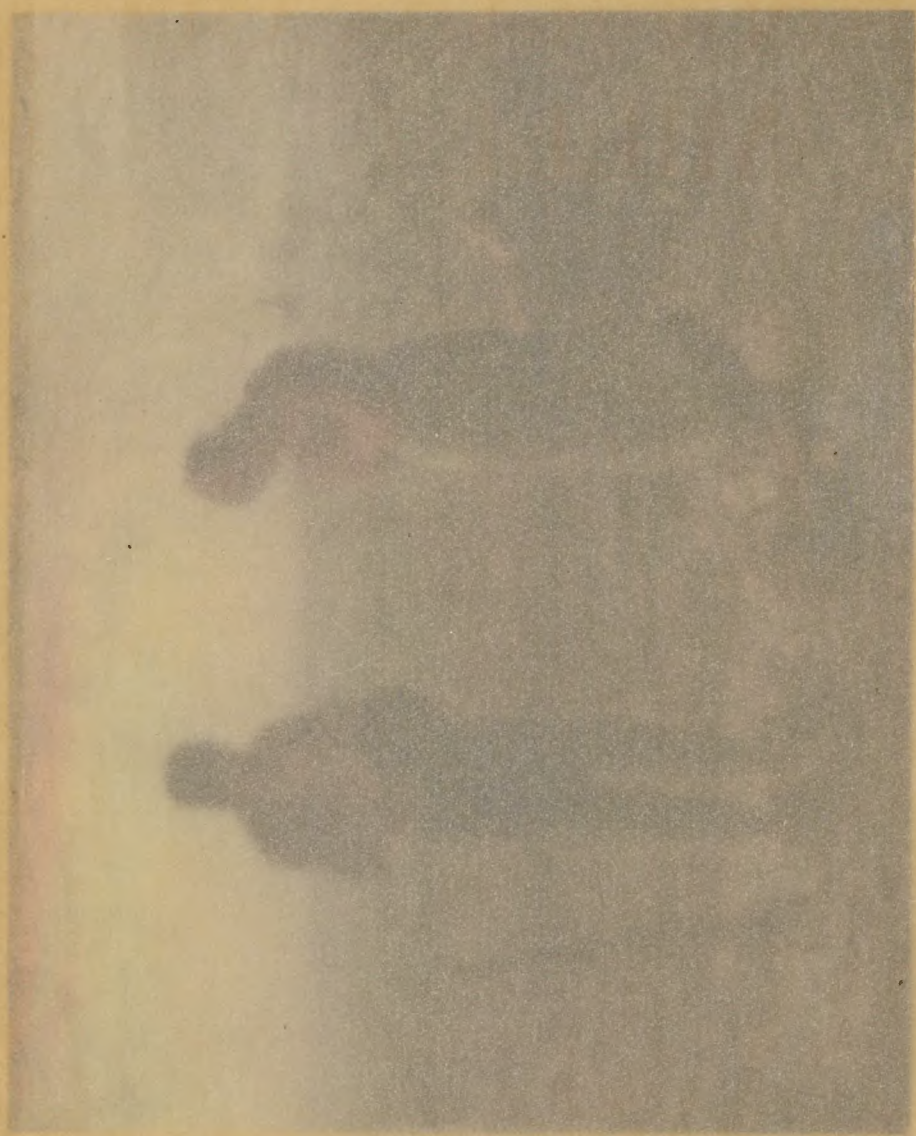
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LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN

MCMVI



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## THE DRAWINGS OF JEAN FRANÇOIS MILLET



MILLET is the most extraordinary of all the great figures which have made the nineteenth century famous in the domain of Art. He stands apart, in grandiose, austere, and enigmatic outline, like some isolated formation, some spontaneous growth of nature, without analogy in the present, without precedent in the past. Before him none would seem to have looked out on this world of ours with eyes so mournfully clear-sighted and so gravely tender; none has expressed with an eloquence so simple and so pathetic those sentiments which were stirring human societies to the depths on the morrow of the great crisis that gave birth to the modern world, and on the eve of yet another decisive effort towards a new stage of progress.

Never, since that inexplicable personality Lenain, to whom he has been compared, had so high and holy a seriousness interpreted the acts and attitudes of the humble folks who make up the mass of mankind; never, since La Bruyère, whose name has often been recalled in this connection, had so lucid an insight, or imagery so rugged and striking, been applied to "those savage-looking animals, male and female, scattered up and down the fields, with livid faces and limbs burnt black by the sun, bond-slaves of the soil, which they dig and delve with an invincible obstinacy," to spare "other men the fatigue of sowing, ploughing, and harvesting, in order to live."

We cannot compare Millet with Chardin, whose grave, heartfelt sympathy penetrates the everyday life of the petty *bourgeoisie*; we must set

aside the Dutch and Flemish masters of *genre*, honest and indifferent observers of domestic realities, or ironical and jovial chroniclers of the gallantries of soldiers and citizens, and of the coarse merrymakings of rustics; in fact, we must go back to the altogether exceptional figure of Rembrandt to find a mode of thought as closely in communion with his models, a soul as compassionate of poverty and wretchedness, as respectful towards effort and labour, as indulgent to the humble and disinherited of this world, as divinely inspired with the breath of an all-embracing tenderness and solidarity.

Not that, at the epoch of Millet's appearance, the ideas he expressed were altogether novel. They were in the air, and we shall see how attempts were made to draw Millet, despite himself, into the camp of the theorists and agitators who were proclaiming the new ideal. He found it no easy matter to defend himself against those misconceptions which contributed to envenom the prejudices awakened by his pictures. But it was, as a matter of fact, the first time such words were spoken and such thoughts formulated in Art apart from any preconceived idea, any definite theory and system, with an energy so extraordinary, a persuasive power so compelling, and all the unconscious force of a nature predestined to the task by the harmonious conjunction of personal temperament, racial aptitude, and special education.

For Millet was in truth the man of his work. This work was not merely the expression of an intellectual concept, an artist's day-dream, the reasoned product of a series of thoughts and observations, it does not evoke an imaginary world dreamed, borrowed or assumed, from sights he had gone out of his way to seek; rather is it the outcome of his life itself, a thing compounded of his most intimate being, his daily thoughts, of all that ever constituted his moral idiosyncrasy, from the first confused notions of childhood to the weighed and chosen conclusions of his latest years. So again, the figures that people it, the episodes that enliven it, and the setting in which they are placed, are suggested by the habitual actors, the accustomed scenes, the everyday details, of that great and wondrous spectacle of reality, whereof he is not merely a sympathetic or interested spectator, but in which he plays a personal part.

The work of Millet, and by this we ought to understand only that portion which he has chosen to acknowledge, is wholly consecrated to the grandeur of



rural life. Indeed, Millet is in the strictest sense a rustic; he belongs essentially to the fields. "You have done well," he writes to Théophile Silvestre, who was preparing a book about him, "to emphasise the rustic element; for, in a word, if this side does not come prominently to the fore in what I have done, it means I have done nothing at all . . ." He adds: "I am a peasant, a peasant." He was, indeed, actually peasant-born, and peasant-bred up to the age of manhood; and no sooner, after the first grievous experiences of his artistic *début* in Paris, does he win some sort of precarious independence, than we find him seeking refuge in the patriarchal life of his forefathers amid the solitude of the fields.

His whole life has long been familiar to us, thanks to the circumstantial account left by the faithful friend and daily witness, so to say, of the occurrences that marked its course and the work that filled its days. Moreover, a flood of light is thrown upon its whole tenour by the confidences the Master himself vouchsafes in letters, memoranda and fragmentary recollections.

In order fully to comprehend the bearing of his work and penetrate its subjective and human side, we must ourselves cast a brief, comprehensive glance over his life history, and recall the never-to-be-forgotten hours of his remote past.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gruchy, the birthplace of Jean-François Millet, a hamlet forming part of the Commune of Gréville, lies in the fold of an upland valley that winds down to the lofty granite cliffs of Cape La Hogue, the feet of which are beaten by the sea waves. Millet, then, was born between sky and earth and ocean. He came into the world on October 4, 1814, the second—the eldest being a girl—of the eight children of Jean-Louis-Nicolas Millet, farmer, this constituting him, on his father's death, head of the family.

Family affection was strongly developed in Millet; it remained true and loyal to the end of his life, and to it we owe a faithful picture of the paternal home, where his ancestors, tillers of the soil from father to son, cultivated and enriched the land. It is an unpretending Normandy farmhouse, with thatched roof and irregularly spaced windows, its walls half hidden by climbing roses. The front faces the rising sun, and Millet as a child could see from his little bed the dust motes dancing in

the morning beams ; westward, it looks out on a fallow enclosure, surrounded by outbuildings, overtopped by a row of trees bent and battered by the sea winds, where fowls peck on the dunghill and ducks paddle in the pools. Millet was cradled amid the hum of spinning-wheels, the babble of women winding or spinning or carding wool, while the men, listening to their gossip, or drowsing over their own thoughts, would sit plaiting baskets of osier-withies. He dropped asleep to the singing of carols or the long-drawn repetition of legends of the Saints and tales of ghosts and fairies ; he awoke, as he was fond of recalling, to hear the cackling of geese in the farmyard, the cock's rising challenge, or the rhythmical beat of the flails in the barn.

The life led by this little rustic society, at once so laborious and so placid, was quite patriarchal. The household was numerous, as in Biblical days, embracing, besides father, mother and eight children, the grandmother and a great-uncle on the paternal side, as well as one or two servants. The Scriptural comparison suggested is no mere literary artifice in this case. No family could have been found where the virtues of former days were more simply and sincerely practised. To the last moments of his glorious and troubled existence Millet never ceased to think, with a heart bursting with love and tenderness, and torn with regret and yearning, of the simple folks, brave and strong and noble-hearted, who guided his first steps with heedful affection and smiled benignly on his boyish games. From his description we know the humble but revered grandmother, bred in the austere teaching of the Port-Royalists, whose Jansenism was tempered by an infinite tolerance and a boundless devotion to others, and whose speech was full of an admirable and simple grandeur. "Remember the virtues of your forefathers," we shall find her saying to him when he is embarking for the great and terrible unknown of Paris. Again later, when she fears he may be degrading his brush by subjects unworthy of his talent: "Follow," the old peasant woman writes to him in the language of a more heroic age, "follow the example of one of your own profession, who used to say: 'I paint for Eternity.'"

Then we may see portrayed by the same hand the paternal great-uncle, whose mighty stature had grown into a family legend, the Abbé Charles Millet, priest and peasant, who, like another St. Christopher, would carry the little François afield with him in his herculean arms, hang his cassock on



some bush to drive his plough through the rich earth, and say mass in the farmhouse with the pewter chalice which Millet preserved as a relic all his life. This figure, though not so clearly defined as the other, for the child was only seven years old at the date of his great-uncle's death, yet filled a large space in the grateful memory of the painter. Then there is his mother, a notable housewife, a sober-minded, careful, submissive woman; and the father, mild and serious of bearing, with a kindly, venerable face, altogether a worthy parent of the great artist whom he foreshadows by his plain, solid virtues and instinctive gifts. He was undoubtedly the most delicately appreciative and surest guide of the nascent predilections of the young lad, already marked out as one of the elect. A thoughtful, observant man, keenly sensible to the beauties of nature, he possessed a fine feeling for music, organised the village choir, and amused himself with modelling in clay and wood-carving. With the keen-sightedness of love he early divined the latent talents that foretold his son's vocation. The boy received a special share of paternal thought and guidance, in this healthy, invigorating atmosphere of peace and concord, piety, uprightness and loving-kindness. His sensitive nature, equally direct and delicate in its outlook, was nourished in the stimulating warmth of a gentle home-life like some rare and tender plant. These early years made Millet the man who was in due course to develop into the artist, and left traces never to be obliterated in his whole personality.

All the more cultured persons of his little circle were eager to help in the lad's education, and—a noteworthy fact this—he already manifested such clear signs of his future genius that not one of his successive masters had any doubt that he was predestined to greatness. First there was the old Curé of Gréville, who was amazed to observe the child's acute sensibility, and predicted his sufferings in after years. There was the schoolmaster, spending his vacation in the country, who delighted to take the lad with him for a long day's walk and set him talking about what he saw by the wayside, and who returned astounded at this peasant child, "whose soul was as charming as a poem." There was the humble little dauber at Cherbourg, Mouchel or Moncel by name, to whom Jean-Louis-Nicolas took his son as soon as the boy's vocation seemed to him beyond doubt. Without a moment's hesitation, at first sight of his little sketches, Mouchel declared the child to have in him "the makings of a great painter." Langlois again, a pupil of David's, whose

studio he entered somewhat later, was equally confident and clear-sighted in his predictions, when he assured the *Conseil Municipal*, from whom he solicited a bursary for his pupil, "of the gratitude all mankind will owe them for having been the first to help to endow France with another great man." Each and all, Delaroche himself included, felt the disquieting charm of this extraordinary youth, so gentle, yet so uncouth and intractable, and were ready to tell him, with a mixture of uneasiness and respect, "You are different to other people." When it needed so many efforts and so fierce a struggle, such strength of determination and force of will, in the midst of almost chronic distress, to compel recognition among the cultured public, these plain provincial folk of the Norman countryside, with the happy confidence of their sturdy, unprejudiced judgment, had already discovered the genius of the sublime dreamer born in their midst.

Millet had already reached man's estate when his father finally resolved to throw open the way to his natural bent. He was in fact eighteen when he was introduced to Mouchel. The studies of his boyhood had been long in abeyance, in order that he might help his father in the work of the farm. He ploughed, sowed, hoed, reaped, wielding all the different implements of agriculture in turn with sufficient adroitness; he noted the course of the seasons, he foretold the rain or the sunshine of the morrow by the varying aspects of wind and weather; he worked amid the peasants, his fellow toilers, amid the patient, laborious beasts of the field, amid the browsing, bleating flocks, amid the cackling poultry, surrounded by all those living things, human, animal and vegetable, active or somnolent, which make up the panorama of rustic existence.

Yet he is no actor mechanically playing his own particular part, he understands both his own life and that of other men; he divines the mutual connection of things, the unity underlying the variegated spectacle of existence; already he penetrates "*cette vie d'ensemble*"—that life of the universe as a whole—which later on he made it his constant preoccupation to express in his work. Henceforth his views are lucid and consistent. A capital and decisive change has taken place in the young man's mind. He lives consciously and sees his road clear before him; he knows what he sees, and understands the sights his eyes rest on. This little forsaken corner of the world offers him day by day incomparable spectacles of well-ordered activity or peaceful solitude, of light and joy, of mystery and melancholy,



while the sea is ever at hand to display to him the splendours of its eternal yet ever-changing aspects, and the appalling tragedies of its storms. So this new faculty of seeing makes another man of him—a complete and competent human being; he is now a conscious agent, and comprehends the higher meaning of his own acts.

This miracle was wrought by Virgil. The Curé of Gréville, whom he accompanied for a while to the more distant parish to which he was appointed, had interested himself in young François at the time when he was preparing for his first Communion; he had noted the lad's keen intelligence and had taught him Latin enough to enable him to read the Bible and the classical authors in that tongue. He expounded Virgil to him, and the charm of the *Bucolics* and *Georgics* produced a profound effect on his mind. He loved in after years to recall the impression left by those mighty words, so full of wisdom and music:

*Majoresque cadunt celsis de montibus umbrae.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Virgil opened his eyes to the grandeur of the daily spectacle of country life.

Virgil and the Bible, the ancient Bible, the old-fashioned pictures of which he loved to copy, and the great-uncle's and grandmother's austere library—St. Augustine and St. Jerome, the Port-Royal philosophers, together with Bossuet and Fénelon—such in those days formed the ascetic diet on which his intelligence was nourished. When his work in the fields left him free, during the time of the midday rest, he tried in uncertain, stammering accents to reproduce the models—men, animals, trees, aspects of garden or sea—that met his eye everywhere. His father watched his attempts with affectionate curiosity, till one day the likeness of an old villager, bent and bowed, which he had caught on coming out of church, struck all his friends so much that Jean-Louis-Nicolas was vividly impressed and determined to take a decisive step.

\* \* \* \* \*

The two drawings which François made to submit to his first master, simple and artless as they are, already show the distinctive characteristics of the future painter. The first was a modern *Bucolic*, a group of two shepherds in a field under a hill, one playing the flute at the foot of a tree, while the other stands listening as he watches his flock. The landscape was taken directly from the surroundings of the paternal home. The second had a more

subjective and mystical motive. It represented a peasant stepping from his cottage door, beneath a starlit sky, to offer bread to a passing beggar. It bore a text from Scripture in explanation of the subject. This first essay marked the starting-point of Millet's rustic inspiration and revealed the beginnings of those sentiments of pity, tenderness and sympathy which illumine all his future work.

These two drawings are of the utmost importance in the history of Millet's life and art; they demonstrate, as we shall show presently, that though Millet was not unconscious of the ideas of his day, his starting point is entirely personal and lies quite outside current events. What he was by independent development at that period of his life, he will continue to be when, after retracing his first tentative steps along other roads, he recovers the true path of his genius. Even these abortive attempts were not entirely without effect in the formation of his moral and artistic individuality. While the diversion of his talents to subjects of mere virtuosity gave his brush suppleness and versatility and freed his hand from the pedantic technicalities of the studio, the mortifications, disillusionments and disappointments of his Parisian days, the isolation in which he found himself, threw him back upon the jealously guarded Eden of the inner life, and by force of contrast brought him closer and closer to the simple past and the vision of country life and country scenes that was ever present to his mind.

From 1835, the date of his entering Mouchel's studio, to 1847, the year which saw his career definitely determined, he lived through a dozen years of vicissitudes more or less lamentable.

He remained hardly two months with Mouchel, his first master, an odd personage to fill that position; he was barely seven years his pupil's senior; and there was much in his character to attract Millet's sympathy, and confirm his nascent predilections. Hence we cannot altogether ignore this humble figure, forgotten by History, this "inspired anchorite," who, we are told, had married a peasant woman and lived like a peasant himself; he had the soul of a St. Francis of Assisi, adoring animals, lost in ecstatic contemplation of Nature, worshipping Art and those artists who strove to paint the realities of life. Just when Millet was beginning to feel, with his master, the stimulus of the Dutch and Flemish painters, Rembrandt, Teniers, Brouwer, the Breughels, whom his instructor held up to his youthful admiration, he was recalled to Gruchy to the bedside of his dying father.



From that moment the whole aspect of his life was altered; the family was broken up, the household ruined, events to be followed presently by the dispersal of his relatives and the tragic end of mother and grandmother, the two beings most dear to the exile's heart. He made a gallant effort to take the father's place at home and on the farm. But something had broken in the bonds that attached him directly to the soil. He had tasted a philtre for which there is no antidote. His fate was sealed; henceforth he was vowed to Art; his path lay clearly marked out before him, the Via Dolorosa of immortality. Such was the conviction of his friends and of the grandmother, who had resumed the direction of the household; she remembered his father's pious wish, and sent François back to Cherbourg, where the lad's artistic future had aroused the interest of certain benevolent amateurs. The results were: his second apprenticeship under Langlois, a period of much enthusiastic reading, when he devoured Châteaubriand, Scott, and Victor Hugo; the departmental bursary, painfully won and repeatedly disputed; and finally, the departure for Paris. He arrived at the capital in January 1837, in a state of moral distress difficult to picture! At first it involved absolute loneliness, without stay or support of any kind, for this gentle soul, so shy and sensitive. He was overwhelmed by the dismal grey sky, the sense of suffocation in the narrow crowded streets shut in by tall gloomy houses; chilled by the cramped icy-cold garret, with its depressing view of chimney-pots, that seemed to offer the spectacle of some vast graveyard, dotted with a fantastic jumble of shabby tombstones; depressed by the mean ugliness of the surroundings, amid which the timid, uncouth country lad, proud, independent, and untameable, had to fight his difficult way. After a sore struggle against diffidence and despondency came his first visit to the *atelier*, and the rough miscellaneous society of his fellow students, most of them insolently or stolidly contemptuous, whom the "wild man of the woods," as they nicknamed him, was constrained to keep at arm's length. Another trial was the unfairness of the master, who, in the competition for the *prix de Rome*, overlooked the merits of other candidates to favour his own *protégé*. Lastly, there was the crushing humiliation of dire poverty.

So shy and timid was he that he dared not so much as ask his way in the streets, and took several days to discover the Louvre. But once there it was indeed a promised land, a very harbour of refuge. Henceforth he had guides, philosophers, and friends, dumb yet eloquent; he was no longer

lonely, and could face the struggle with all the purpose, energy and obstinacy of the peasant. Presently, resolved to pursue his way without useless and unavailing regrets, he sought to supplement his meagre allowance, again and again disputed and cut down ; he painted his fellow lodgers, occupants of the neighbouring garrets, the servants, even the *concierge* and the *charbonnier*. A friend, the only one he had made, who shared his room, urged him to try little figure-pieces, in the taste of the eighteenth century, which the minor *genre* painters, inspired by the decadent Romanticism of the day, were bringing into vogue. These the good-natured Marolle volunteered to "place" with the dealers. However, Millet made his actual *début* with a *Charity* in the style of Michelangelo—the Master who from that time seems to have most deeply impressed him. The attempt having met with no sort of success, he made up his mind to follow his friend's advice to the letter, and produced a series of little pastels which recall, more or less imperfectly, Boucher and Fragonard. Marolle eventually managed to get a louis for the lot. These productions, once esteemed so lightly, are beginning to be collected nowadays. To judge by sundry specimens, they lack neither spirit nor cleverness, and might perhaps have made the reputation of a second-rate painter. There is even a *Vert-vert* of a strongly marked comic flavour that recalls Daumier. The production of these pot-boilers, bringing him into contact as it did with the elegance of the eighteenth century, at any rate served to wean him by degrees from the methods of Delaroche's studio.

To the Salon of 1840 he sent two portraits, resolved to put his fortune to the touch ; and one of these was accepted. This was something of a triumph at a time when, as Millet found to his cost later on, the best men were almost invariably proscribed. Content with this small foretaste of success, he returned in the fine summer days, as he had formed the habit of doing every year, to the humble farmhouse at Gruchy, to draw in fresh life with the air of his native place, among the kindly folks who now only lived for him. He then settled for a time at Cherbourg, where he had all sorts of paltry difficulties with the Municipality. He managed, however, to make a living by some portrait commissions ; and finally, his tender, sensitive nature craving a companion and moral support, he married a young girl who was one of his models. This, the painter's first marriage—a union which lasted barely three years—was so unhappy that Millet, his biographer tells us, would never refer to this painful period of

his life, when bitter poverty assailed him by the bedside of a sick and dying wife.

Returning to Paris in 1842, he left the capital again in 1844, after his wife's death, for Cherbourg. This time he had a better reception there, thanks to a small success obtained at the Salon. He painted portraits, and in 1845 he took a second wife, Catherine Lemaire, a native of Lorient, who became the mother of his children and the faithful and devoted companion of his toilsome life.

At last he enjoyed a moment's respite. Making a stay of some length at Havre, he obtained a number of comparatively advantageous commissions for portraits and *genre* subjects, and by the end of 1845 was able to return to Paris after amassing quite a little store of ready money. He remained there till 1849. At that date, agitated by politics and scared by the cholera, he took refuge, temporarily as he supposed, at Barbizon, which became his home for the rest of his days. Circumstances were leading him to the definitive realisation of his ideal of life and contemplation. He was about to re-establish, in the solitude of the fields and woods, amid the simple toilers and lowly homesteads of the country, his own patriarchal hearth, after the likeness of that of his early years; he was about to find himself in daily communion, as of old, with the toil and travail of men labouring to subdue the soil and wrestling to circumvent the seasons, with the scenes, so touching and dignified in their domesticity, of women plying their household tasks or bending over their little ones, with the spectacle, eternally the same yet eternally new, of mankind living in the bosom of Nature, and of Nature enfolding mankind in her splendour, her mystery, and her majesty.

However, it was not till the year 1851 that Millet finally renounced the hesitations of the past to consecrate himself unreservedly to what he began to feel was his true vocation. Sensier tells us under what circumstances this decision was taken. Ever since 1844, when he had won some success at the Salon with his *Leçon d'Equitation* (The Riding Lesson), a pastel drawing of children which had delighted discerning critics by a certain charming *gaucherie* and by its fresh pure colour, Millet wavered for several years between two provisional manners. In the first, when making ambitious efforts for the Salons, he sacrificed to the traditional motives of the schools, painting heroic, classical, or Biblical subjects: *St. Jerome tempted by*



*Women*, 1845, *Edipus unbound from the Tree*, 1847, *Captivity of the Jews at Babylon*, which was exhibited in 1848, together with *The Winnower*, *Samson and Delilah*, *Mercury carrying off the Flocks of Argus*, *Hagar and Ishmael*. In the second, he surrenders himself to the inspiration of mythology and character-subjects imbued with a daintily voluptuous Paganism, the outcome of his dallings with the sensuous prettinesses of the eighteenth century. In this class we find *An Offering to Pan*, *Daphnis and Chloe*, and studies of women bathing, nude women asleep and peeping fauns, nude women reclining on a bed and seen from behind, nude or half-nude girls as nymphs or dryads seated in the woods, or, again, children at play looking like Cupids.

If Millet, like too many others, had mistaken his proper vocation, and persevered in these two directions, there is little doubt that he would have made a fortune and died a member of the Institut.

Whatever criticism was bestowed on his exhibited pictures, chiefly from the point of view of his technique, which, following the methods popularised by the Romantic school, and modified by the artful chemical combinations of Décamps and the luscious concoctions of Diaz, delighted in an exaggerated richness of colour, a most flattering welcome was extended to his historical canvases, at any rate to his *Edipus*, conceived in the taste of Delacroix, whose panegyric was presently repeated by the pens of the most famous critics, such men as Thoré and Théophile Gautier. As for his other compositions, the harmony between figures and landscape, the quiet warmth of tone, less brilliant but also less meretricious than that of Diaz, bring him into line with Delacroix; they show a quality at once familiar and impressive, sensuous yet chaste, while in the nude studies there is something that recalls the antique—the antique as conceived at the time by Chassériau, and as understood at a later date by Gustave Moreau and Puvis de Chavannes. These little compositions, with their voluptuous and melancholy note, appealed with extraordinary force to his admirers and friends.

There were two such at this period of Millet's life, who were admitted to some degree of intimacy and sustained him with their warmest sympathy—I mean, I need hardly say, Diaz and Charles Jacque. It is likely enough that the vacillation still noticeable in Millet's manner was due to some extent to the diverse influences of these two friends.

Surrounded and stimulated by the group of painters who, whether under

stress of contemporary political events, or for reasons of a purely artistic order, were turning to the study of realities in town and country, Jacque, who had already achieved a reputation by his drawings and engravings, had for the last two or three years devoted himself to painting, was now an ardent disciple of the old Dutch and Flemish masters, and was beginning to win success with his studies of poultry and pigs. At the same moment we find Millet venturing upon some tentative excursions into country scenes with subjects in which the seductions of *genre* were hardly distinguishable from the genuine aspects of rustic life. We are spectators of a transition, more or less pronounced, from the past, which he is soon to repudiate altogether, to the definite and final conception of his artistic mission, which is destined to grow more and more precise as time goes on.

In fact, after *A Young Man* wheeling a barrow of weeds, a homely scene that seems, as Sensier puts it, "an echo of Fragonard in a robuster vein," and *A Girl carrying a Lamb*, a motive of which the artist afterwards gave another version, he steps out more and more boldly and swiftly along the path to subjects of real, we may even say of present day, life. He paints a mother asking alms, a mother suckling her child, quarrymen hauling stone with a windlass at Charenton, navvies working at the Montmartre excavations, the workman's Monday morning, etc., till he ends with the decisive figure of *The Winnowers* (Salon of 1848), which forms the definite starting-point of this new departure.

Everything seems to show that he found in Jacque, on whom Millet was, in his turn, to exert so marked an influence later on, an encouragement to persevere in the new way, which was indeed the natural path of his genius; on the other hand, we may fairly assume that Diaz's enthusiasm for what has been styled Millet's "flowery manner," closely akin to his own voluptuous and iridescent handling, may have kept him longer than would have been the case, perhaps, had he been left to himself, intent on the material glorification of beauty by brilliant renderings of the nude. A word overheard in the street saved him.

One evening, Sensier tells us, he noticed two young men examining a painting of his in a picture-dealer's window. "Do you know who it is by?" asked one. "Oh yes!" replied the other; "one Millet, who paints nothing but naked women."

Cut to the quick, and realising with bitter chagrin the mistake he had

made, he had the courage to abandon work which at any rate ensured him his daily bread; it was a hard sacrifice, but it gave him the bitter-sweet satisfaction of feeling himself at last his own man.

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The *Vanneur* was received with greater favour than the *Captivité des Juifs à Babylone*, which latter, despite its undoubted merits, left the general public indifferent. It may be that the *Vanneur* came at a propitious moment. It was now 1848; the slow fermentation of minds during the successive periods of political servitude to which the French nation had been subjected, had culminated in the establishment of the Second Republic, amid an eruption of the most fantastic utopias and wildly chimerical schemes that ever generous hearts conceived in a glowing atmosphere of republican and democratic mysticism.

It is difficult in these calmer days to imagine the general frenzy of enthusiasm which fired the men of that epoch. The door stood wide to every flattering hope. The idea of an age of universal brotherhood about to dawn upon the world was in the air. Indeed, this date of 1848 did actually mark the completion of a second stage in the enfranchisement of human societies, morally, socially, and politically. It was the starting point of a fresh advance along the path of progress. The events of February reacted upon all Europe. We may truly say that the origin, development and methodical organisation of that democratic ideal which has become the ideal of all modern nations date from 1848.

This date of 1848, all important in the history of public affairs, is equally memorable, and for the same reasons, in the history of contemporary Art. It may be the epoch of 1830, that of the Romantic movement, shines with a more brilliant lustre, whether by reason of the famous battles that were then fought out, or because of the pre-eminent chieftains who led the heroic combatants on either side; but it cannot be denied that the victory remained indecisive, and that the artistic mind was not yet completely emancipated from the prejudices, conventionalities, and routines of darker days. In literature the Romantic masters had created a dialect, free, fluent, and independent, competent to express all the inward emotions of the soul no less than all the external aspects of the universe; they had made Painting an admirable instrument, a means of expression of a vigour, sonority, variety, and richness hitherto undreamt of; but they fell in their



turn into the very same mistakes as the Classicists they had attacked so gallantly. They, too, went on living in books, drawing their inspiration from the past—albeit it was another past, substituting Ossian, Byron, and Walter Scott for Plutarch, Livy, and Homer, replacing the gods, princes, and heroes of antiquity by the kings, knights, and martyrs of Christianity. Their imagination, violently awakened by an unprecedented impulse of poetic exaltation, continued to move in an imaginary world. They knew nothing of the men of their own day and of contemporary life. "In olden days," Thoré could write, "Art was for gods and princes; it may be that the time has come to offer it to man."

This was the ideal the generation of 1848 was to follow, and Millet was, voluntarily or not, its highest and most significant incarnation.

Already, on the very morrow of the great triumphs of 1830, a reaction had set in against the new tyranny of the "Gothic." Revolutionaries, like Lasiron in his "Salon" of 1833, were protesting that Art had only been emancipated from one clique to be enslaved by another, and that every day it was getting further from its true aim, which is, he declared, "truth and actuality"; they began to lift up their voices on behalf of the formula they were the first to christen Naturalism.

This conception of things manifested itself more especially among the landscapists, by a more reverent and humble study of Nature, not now in her abnormal effects, her unexpected and exceptional manifestations, but under her most usual and familiar aspects. An ever-growing interest was shown in the familiar characteristics of domestic nature, those most intimately connected with man; and this interest develops into a more enlightened, more intelligent, more emotional sympathy with the lowly dwellers in its midst.

But the special circumstances which preceded and accompanied the Revolution of 1848, and indeed largely brought it about, precipitated the movement, and hastened the birth of what was known subsequently as "The Democratic School," which proclaimed, in opposition to the selfish watchword of degenerate Romanticism, "Art for Art's sake," the new gospel of "Art for Man's sake."

The philosophic doctrine of Saint-Simonism and its various offshoots had a considerable share in the formation of this new ideal of altruism, social sympathy, fraternal equality, in which the moral obligations imposed

upon mankind were dominated by the new cult, which rallied all the churches and creeds to its banner, the cult of the great universal law of Labour.

As in ethics, so in literature, this philosophical ferment produced a democratic, social and popular movement of great intensity—ranging from the superhuman work of Balzac to George Sand's romances of country life and the rustic songs of Pierre Dupont. In due course the movement reacted on the arts. Indeed, it was all the more violently felt in this direction, because the artists, long in revolt against the intolerance of Juries which closed the doors of exhibitions to the most gifted of their number, readily merged their professional interests in their social and political hopes. This great democratic crisis, moreover, produced a special phenomenon in this particular world. It had the effect of recalling the artists, the majority of whom were of plebeian origin, to the surroundings from which they had sprung, it detached them from historic legends in which they took but a languid interest, and opened their eyes to the neglected beauties and grandeurs of their daily existence.

Thus the Revolution of 1848 gave a strong impetus to the arts in the realistic and popular direction, and finally determined the course of the currents of thought which had been setting in various directions ever since the beginning of the century.

It is impossible to form an exact appreciation of the part Millet played in his generation and the place he deserves to occupy among the artists of the second half of the nineteenth century, without taking into account the previous attempts made to recall Art to the natural mission it had so long forgotten: that of fixing the picture of the society to which it corresponds. So long had the nation been absorbed in the sovereign, and the people divorced from public life, that painting ignored the masses. At this, the dawn of our modern world, the public needed the influence of the Dutch and Flemish masters of *genre*—eagerly collected for some years and brought within the reach of everybody in the public galleries—to recall attention to the working classes and suggest all that might be drawn from this source of inspiration. At first it was approached very tentatively and timidly, the new attempts being indeed limited to exact imitation of the models; the careful finish was minutely reproduced, and the theme was popularised by insistence on "the subject," *i.e.*, the element of sentiment anecdotically expressed,

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on which painters relied to make their false pictures of contemporary life acceptable to the public.

The dawn of new ideas is apparent, however, in Géricault's *Lime-Kilm*, in the Louvre, to take an example which forcibly heralds Millet from afar. Even Granet, Léopold Robert and Schnetz, men who, incapacitated by the prejudices of their training from expressing the grandeur and dignity of the country scenes of their native land, were constrained to satisfy their love of truth, their taste for the picturesque and their sympathy with the lowly, by interpreting the joys and sorrows, the work and play, the loves and revenges of Italian peasants, show a definite desire to treat these subjects of popular inspiration with the gravity they merit, with the dignity inherent in them, with all they have preserved of the heroic and epic in their familiar aspects, in a word, with the breadth of treatment and sense of style hitherto reserved exclusively for History. Yet, as we see from these very instances, so great was the difficulty of carrying this ideal into execution, of giving expression to this lofty classic formula, that Painting hesitated, and has gone on hesitating almost to the present moment, between a hidebound subserviency to the Dutch masters, and that quest after exotic beauties which sent our artists wandering to Italy and the East.

Even in Millet's own circle, the early realists who foreshadowed him, and whose direct successors were presently to rally round Courbet and his aggressive banner, fare forth on their search after actualities, from Brittany to the Pyrenees, from Alsace to Auvergne, even from Spain to Algeria and Morocco. They cannot rid their imaginations of a hankering, still purely romantic, after the picturesque.

Nevertheless, to determine the precise features of Millet's own art, and to indicate his points of contact with that of his period, it will be well to recall the names of certain artists who had in some degree a premonition of what he realised with such incomparable grandeur.

Certain of these, it might even be claimed, exercised some slight influence on Millet at the point of his career we are now considering. Nor does such a fact in any way detract from his greatness, proving as it does that it was not by hitherto unattempted representations of things in a world never before explored, but by adding to the higher moral joys of humanity new treasures of emotion and contemplation, that he has earned our gratitude.



Amongst the rest there was at this date one master, one powerful and unique personality, who has long been an object of public curiosity, viz., Decamps. This strange personage, standing apart from all the rival schools amid which he grew to maturity, neither Classic nor Romantic, but both at once by virtue of his preoccupation with style and his demand for imagination, his love of the picturesque and his cravings after realism, to say nothing of his very definite ideas of technique, undoubtedly exerted the most potent preparatory influence on the development of modern Art.

A stern student of antiquity, with a visionary's insight into its secrets, and at the same time the founder of Orientalism, he had fixed his inquiring eyes not only on the popular life of Italy, but on the familiar aspects of his own country, picking up the brush that had fallen from the hands of Géricault to paint, with a laborious and complex technique, an intense and concentrated purpose, farmyards, canal horses, beggars, muleteers, which he set in vigorous outline against wide landscapes violently illuminated. Decamps was the unanimously accepted leader of all the realists who at that epoch were tossing feverishly in the vortex of events, and preparing, so to speak, the way for Millet.

Millet himself, both when his fancy is attracted to classical subjects, as also in the first tentative efforts of his modern outlook, reveals the influence Decamps wielded over his contemporaries. He did not know him personally till much later, at Barbizon, when his most important works had already made him famous, and Decamps himself had manifested a lively curiosity to make the acquaintance of an artist who interested him so profoundly. But, secluded as his life had been, Millet was too far-seeing, too enquiring, and too well-informed, to hold entirely aloof from the things of art and life. At a subsequent period, when he was to seek refuge in his solitude at Barbizon, we see from his correspondence how burning a desire he felt to know and learn. He was far from locking himself up in his artistic pride, and scorning the advice of other masters. On his first arrival in Paris, he went straight to the Louvre, dividing all his time there between the early Italians and Michelangelo, Correggio and Giorgione, Poussin and even Lesueur. When later on he receives the commission for his decorations in the Boulevard Haussmann, we shall find him visiting Fontainebleau to see "those fine old giants" Rosso and Primaticcio. Later again, he was drawn to the art of Japan by the "natural and human element" he discerned in it, and he wrote to his friend

Fenardant, who was starting for Italy, to bring him back, if possible, photographs of antiquities, of wall-paintings at Herculaneum and Pompeii, or of old masters, "from Cimabué to Michelangelo inclusive," his sole pre-occupation being to have "those figures of men, and also of animals, which show least of academies and models."

He is no mere creature of instinct then, but an intellect conscious of itself and aware of its own bent. Defending himself energetically against the compromises of the schools, he was far from indifferent to the ferment of new forms and new ideas about him. Nor is Decamps' passing influence upon Millet merely deducible from internal evidences; it is an indisputable fact of great importance, observed and attested by penetrating contemporary critics such as Thoré.

But among contemporaries who anticipate him in the delineation of popular subjects, there are two at least whose names deserve to be remembered. One is the worthy Cals, the son of a working-man and one of the people to the end, who spent his life under the same moral and social conditions as Millet. A mild recluse of the same contemplative, dreamy, and mystic disposition, he worked in his humble home from 1835 onwards, producing a series of paintings of poor people, vagabonds, *proletarians*, to use a word then just coming into vogue, peasants going to work in the fields or returning at nightfall, goodwives spinning by the fireside, mothers bending over their children's cradles. These homely scenes were bathed in a grey, melancholy atmosphere of touching and poignant tenderness.

There is no evidence to show that Millet knew, at any rate at the beginning of his career, this obscure forerunner, who, indeed, achieved little or no celebrity beyond a limited group of friends and admirers till after his death.

But there was a second predecessor, who died in somewhat miserable circumstances, though for a while he filled an important post and did good service to the State. His name still awaits rehabilitation. Jeauron still suffers from the unjust oblivion to which he has been condemned.

Jeauron makes his appearance in Millet's life at the critical date of 1848. He had just been nominated by the Republican Government Director of the National Museums. This is not the place to discuss the important traces of his activity in the great collections of the Louvre. Having heard of Millet's distress, he brought Ledru-Rollin to see him; the politician procured him a

commission of 1800 francs, and purchased the *Vanneur* on his own account.

Later, when Jeauron had retired to Marseilles in a mood of melancholy resignation to fill the inferior post of Director of the local Ecole des Beaux Arts, we find Millet writing him a few words of sympathy and appreciation. At the time with which we are dealing, he had already exhibited for seventeen years. Dominated by his democratic leanings, he had been among the first to celebrate the daily aspects of popular life in a perfectly novel aspect. Delineator of the heroes of July, of rugged handicraftsmen, blacksmiths, ploughmen, smugglers, Thoré called him "the most plebeian of painters," and again declared him to be "a plebeian painter, even in the treatment of landscape." He had illustrated Louis Blanc's *Histoire de Dix Ans*, and Ledru-Rollin, who favoured his tendencies, agreeing as they did with his own political ideal, had commissioned him to execute a series of studies illustrating the life of the working-man. Jeauron is very unjustly neglected nowadays, and his works, dispersed in various provincial galleries, no longer recall him to our minds. But all who have had an opportunity of examining his vigorous drawings—carefully thought out, strongly accentuated, deliberately planned and decisively expressed,—must acknowledge some connection between them and Millet's work, dealing as they did at the same period with analogous subjects.

Even if we see in this a chance affinity, resulting from identity of origin and attachment to the same traditions, we cannot deny it altogether; and it is instructive to note it, as it accounts for the reception accorded to Millet in his new departure, and defines the absolutely novel elements he gave to contemporary Art.

For we may declare in all confidence that the *Vanneur*, so far as subject goes, was no isolated phenomenon. We need but glance round the walls of this same Salon of 1848, which throw its doors open to artists of all shades of thought, and we shall find works of similar inspiration figuring under the names of Cals, Antigua, Fugen, of Bonhomme with his interiors of forges and rolling-mills, of Loubon of Marseilles, with his *Mineurs du Tunnel de la Nerthe* (Miners in the Tunnel of the Nerthe), of Chaplin, the future "Boucher of the Second Empire," still working on his first subjects—swine and swineherds, the mountaineers and spinstresses of Auvergne—of Lambert himself, the future painter of cats, with his farmhouse kitchens, of Édouard



Frère, of Hébert, with his *Woman Churning*, of Luminais, who made his *début* with Breton landscapes, like Leleux, before devoting himself to Merovingian history. Then there is our friend Jeauron, and Courbet, who began as a painter of battles, and Bonvin, another newcomer—to say nothing of the brothers Leleux, Lessoire and Ed. Hédouin, travelling for the moment in Algeria. Neither must we forget the gallant Daumier, who, in his obscure, unobtrusive way, was attempting to do for the city what Millet had done for the country, and last, but not least, a young sympathiser, one who threw himself heart and soul into the struggle, but who eventually developed in an optimistic direction, as a devotee of plastic form and harmony of composition, continuing the work of Léopold Robert on more realistic lines—I mean Jules Breton.

I have said enough to show that the *Vanneur* cannot have come as a surprise to the people of Millet's generation; it was no sudden and spontaneous apparition. It answered, in its manner, to an ideal virtually accepted. But it is just this manner that gives it a place apart from and above similar works of the same date, and marked it out for the admiration of some, and the imbecile animosity of others.

The universal ideal set forth by political agitators and speculative thinkers had indeed so far gained ground that work was now looked upon as a patent of nobility, a duty, a law. The perilous experiments which owed their origin to this utopia of the "rights of labour"—rights in which the artists, too, claimed their share—are familiar to us all. This ideal was bound to crystallise, and in Art it took the form of a typical figure—that of the toiler, the worker in the factory or the field, the artisan and the peasant, whose struggles and hardships, whose home life and home surroundings, whose griefs and joys, whose protests and aspirations, continue to be glorified anew at each fresh stage of social and democratic progress.

Among those who were guided by this realistic and popular inspiration, some were attracted mainly by the picturesque elements of the Romantic movement in the midst of which they had developed, while others were governed by political and philosophical convictions. They were thus divided between the spirit of curiosity and the spirit of system—to say nothing of the common sentiment which united all who were opposed to tyranny and routine and made Realism their battlecry. Realism, in

fact, was about to replace Romanticism in the battle against officialdom, and to be supplanted in its turn by Impressionism—one and all formularies that express the same impatience, the same discontent, the same revolt against dogmas, churches, and pontiffs.

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Amid these divergent currents Millet remains essentially isolated. He stands aloof by the very individuality of his mental attitude. His objective is not the same. He has enlisted under no banner, and makes no claim to lead or control any faction. This is why, in the rapid development of this modern, popular, realistic movement, the opposing forces rallied, not round Millet, but round Courbet, who with his lofty insolence, his superb scorn, and his readiness to incur odium and unpopularity, became the very incarnation of Realism—a realism to which he will claim to give a philosophical and mathematical significance, a rationalistic, positivist, and exclusive character. Millet was far from falling into the perversities of his turbulent rival. He was essentially a creature of the wilds, a lonely recluse who found no followers, even when he was understood and loved, and whose influence, an all-important factor in the artistic consciousness of modern times, did not begin to make itself really felt till after his death. He was no wanton destroyer of the past, no noisy propagandist of a new art—though Corot, perplexed and agitated by his pictures, declared them to be for him, as indeed they were for all, “a new world.” Far from being a revolutionist, a professional agitator, his temperament inclined him rather towards submission to natural laws and respect for tradition. And for him tradition was represented mainly by the giant who dominates it, Michelangelo, and the great classicist who directs it, Poussin. These were the two leaders he venerated and preferred. The innate conservatism of his peasant nature ruled him in these matters, both in his philosophical tendencies and in his æsthetic activity. Unresponsive to the enthusiasms and infatuations of the moment, he remained profoundly himself, in spite of the earlier *avatars* forced on his genius by circumstances. So conservative was his mental attitude that he confesses he was long in learning to appreciate the only painter among the moderns who inspired him with genuine admiration—Delacroix.

How strange then and how cruel was the misunderstanding which

discovered in his work a plan of campaign, a propaganda in favour of revolutionary and socialist ideals! For as such his chief works were received, particularly his *Sower* of 1850, who seemed, the critics wrote, "to be hurling handfuls of grapeshot in the face of heaven," and still more, his *Labourer Resting on his Hoe*, of 1863, a subject in connection with which his admirers appositely recalled the savage phrases of Labruyère. A furious battle between admirers and detractors raged round this figure. We cannot read without sorrow certain perverse utterances signed with some of the greatest names in criticism—one, for instance, in which Paul de Saint-Victor accuses Millet of "glorifying imbecility," and jestingly describes this solemn and affecting subject as "the murderer Dumollard burying a servant girl."

Very possibly the noisy braggadocio and anarchical manifestoes of the master of Ornans, had something to do with the painful misconceptions which caused Millet so much suffering. The scandal provoked by the one artist involved the other, for different as their ideals were, both were disturbing the peace of the sated and self-satisfied. Accordingly, while some tried to draw him into their camp, others repelled and insulted him. Lonely and independent, the great and unhappy man was refractory on the one hand, and indignant on the other, while his friends exhausted themselves in vain efforts to defend him amidst contentions, the consequences of which were poverty and lifelong embarrassment for himself and his large family.

Yet he had a genuine horror of politicians and demagogues, and this revolution, which all his fellow-artists greeted with joyous enthusiasm, their hearts swelling with ardent hopes, caused him nothing but uneasiness and distress. He had always, from his days in Delaroche's *atelier*, set his face against the Socialist propaganda—which Jacque, later on, took a pleasure, spiced perhaps with malice, in upholding in his presence. Thinker and dreamer, no one was ever less fit for action and battle. So, albeit his openness of mind, his generosity of soul, drew him in the direction of new ideas and liberal associations, albeit he took part in the competition for a figure of the Republic, albeit he accepted the patronage of Ledru-Rollin, and when the time came, fired his shot like the rest on the June barricades, the turmoil, declamations, fusillades, and slaughter of his day horrified and disgusted him; he turned from them to withdraw more deeply into himself and to take refuge in the peaceful country, where he was presently to fix his abode.



Not that Millet, indeed, held aloof, or wished to hold aloof, from the moral and social interests of his century. He shared the publicly expressed sentiments of his contemporaries—of sympathy for the lowly and down-trodden, the hardworking and suffering masses, the disinherited of the earth; but he cherished his convictions not on any *à priori* grounds, as the result of theory or speculation, reason or enthusiasm. He felt them before they were urged upon him by the echoes of speeches, books and newspapers, political clubs and meetings. He found them in the depths of his own heart—these emotions of love and pity for those who were, indeed, his fellows and kinsmen.

"I repudiate with all my might," he writes, "the democratic doctrine—as understood in political clubs, and attributed to me . . . I have never dreamt of pleading a cause of any sort. I am a peasant—a peasant." A peasant! This is the secret of that stern yet tender eloquence, harsh or caressing, an eloquence unheard before, which surprised the attention of his contemporaries, disturbing and disconcerting them till they came to grasp its true meaning and its grandeur. He had lived the life and shared the toil of those to whose struggles and labour, to whose sorrows and grave, monotonous pleasures, he gave expression. He is their interpreter, their strenuous spokesman. If character and conditions helped him, it was chiefly by turning his thoughts back upon himself, and so leading him towards a more profound and thorough comprehension, towards the vision of the Gruchy farm-lad, who, like the little Giotto quitting his goats, left the plough to carry the two sketches that decided his future to Cherbourg, works in which he had already laid bare the original inspiration of his art—love of country life and the sentiment of pity and solidarity. "Indeed," he says himself in words it is needless to paraphrase, "the foundation of everything is always this, that a man must be touched himself to be able to touch others, and that all which is based merely on speculation, no matter how ingenious, cannot effect that end, because it is impossible it should have the breath of life in it." This is the reason why, without a notion of system or investigation, without any thought of protest or self-defence, trying to say simple things simply, those holy things he had within him from a child by virtue of faith, honesty and the earnestness that comes of absolute sincerity, "he penetrated," as Sensier puts it, "despite himself and without knowing how, to the quick of the question under

debate," and realised a work, originated an art, of a moral and social significance he little suspected.

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In the course of the twenty-seven years which form the last and most important stage of his career, Millet worked out his whole dream of life and labour. He dwelt henceforth in the bosom of the Forest, his great and glorious fairy kingdom, where he reigned jointly with the illustrious friend, whose name is inseparable from his in death and immortality, Théodore Rousseau. He lives amid the fields, made homely by the presence and activity of man, himself in the centre of this activity, which he sees accomplished in a regular rhythm, following the course of the seasons and the march of the planets, with all the solemnity of a great natural operation, all the majesty of a divine law.

Henceforth, Millet's life and work were one. He was merged in the changing phantasmagoria of Nature, and with the primitive, rustic population of workers round him, himself an indefatigable worker, whom neither ill-success nor grinding poverty, nor precarious health could discourage. His patriarchal family of nine children, governed by an admirable helpmate, was presently augmented by two young brothers, ambitious to follow in their elder's footsteps.

In this primitive household, a sequel to the old Gruchy home, he never ceased painting and drawing the world about him; transcribing thus the life he saw, he combined the recollections of his boyhood and the observations renewed—with what emotion!—the last time he revisited his native soil, with impressions received day by day from the immediate reality of his woodland village.

The *Winnower* of 1848 was succeeded by a *Sower*, which at once defined his uncompromising ideal of rustic sentiment, so clearly indeed that the work, as we know, was received as a profession of faith. It was followed by a series of sheaf-binders, harvesters, potato-planters, etc. So by degrees this vast conception of rural life shapes and co-ordinates itself in his mind. He sees all the phases and aspects of labour; and this rustic world, apparently so limited, offers him such abundance of picturesque material—material always renewable at pleasure—that for all the days and nights, all the months and years, of his unflagging industry, by painting or pastel, by drawing or etching, he can never exhaust it. Nay, he might have spent all the years

of a second lifetime over the same tasks without either wearying or repeating himself. For he never returned to the same motives without seeing them each time in a new light, or "forcing the subject," as he says, "expressing it to the utmost."

Works which mark effort or struggle or which display patience and skill are numerous. Here stands the Winnower, shaking his wicker fan in the amber mist and mysterious penumbra of the barn; there, in the bare field sloping up to the high horizon, against which we see the outlines of horses ploughing, the Sower moves along with a heavy, measured tread, trampling the clods, while with a broad, sweeping gesture of his arm he scatters the grain among the gaping furrows. Here again Sheaf-binders, their crouching bodies forming a sculpturesque mass with the sheaves they grasp in their arms, seem to be wrestling in the misty, laden atmosphere, full of sunshine, dust, and motes. Then there is the Fruit-grower, almost motionless, so carefully, with quiet, restrained, deliberate gestures, does he make the graft with his pocket-knife when the patch of bark is stripped from the fruit-tree, while a young woman, gravely attentive, and an inquisitive workman watch the skilful process of selection and fecundation. We turn to a warm Spring landscape, where a group of peasants are putting in potatoes. The field lies far from the cottage home; so father and mother have brought the child along with them on an ass, which browses in happy content by the trunk of an ancient pear-tree, in the hollow of which the improvised cradle is placed. Spud in hand, the man opens a hole, into which the woman throws two or three tubers; and this prosaic task assumes an air of homely dignity, the atmosphere of a Biblical scene, in the glory and tranquillity of the vernal air. All these laborious figures, so patient, calm and courageous, are completed and surpassed by two strange and haunting types—*L'Homme à la Houe* and *Le Vigneron* (The Man with the Hoe, The Vine-dresser). These two extraordinary beings, in which the uncouth, savage side of the life of the people is brought out with unparalleled vigour, have set much ink flowing. The truth is, take them as we will, and there is only one way of doing so nowadays, they sum up with the utmost possible force of expression Millet's compassionate comprehension of that merciless and unceasing slavery, the Gehenna to which mankind seems condemned from the beginning by the divine malediction. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread," God said to man from the threshold of Paradise, and this is the explanation



Millet contents himself with giving, in protest against the revolutionary significance his contemporaries were pointing out in these "savage-looking animals," as Labruyère called them. Millet does not paint revolt, he paints resignation. The peasant never revolts. Against whom, against what, should he rebel? He is submissive to the decrees of Nature. He knows beforehand that the work of a whole season may be destroyed by a single hailstorm, a night's frost, a mere change of direction in the mighty currents that govern the system of the heavens. He bows beneath disaster, and makes ready to start afresh.

This is where the work of Constantin Meunier, the heir of his genius, differs from Millet's. Meunier paints the workman, and more especially the miner. The latter, dealing with forces disciplined by man, has his share in the progress achieved, and this progress can only be carried out by his intermediation. Hence his consciousness of his own activity in the part he is called upon to play, and the claims he makes upon those who employ him. The "right to labour," of which there was so much talk in Millet's circle, was soon to develop into "the rights of labour." Such the phrase that was to be spoken, when Millet had passed away, by new generations familiar with those upheavals of the masses, that new and unprecedented struggle between two forces, heretofore unknown and still unnamed, but to-day so equally matched and so powerful that their strife is vaster than the conflict of any other human forces—Capital and Labour. It is principally in the countries of "intensive" industry that this modification of Millet's spirit was to appear—for instance, in Belgium, where, side by side with Constantin Meunier's work, are found the realistic and mystic productions of Léon Frédéric, Struys, Lacmans, etc. Millet knows nothing of crowds; rural life only admits of very limited associations—the old-world associations of the family and the farm, which resembles that of the tribe. Neither is he familiar with the *Strike*, a subject which Roll is to essay later. He knows only the peasant—the man whose foot is bound to the soil; and in another symbol, yet more significant, Millet shows us his unalterable resignation; going back to La Fontaine's familiar theme, he paints *La Mort et le Bûcheron* (Death and the Woodcutter). In spite of weariness and misery, how sturdily the woodcutter clings to his faggot, when the great Consoler, whom he has over-hastily invoked, actually appears.

But Millet's work is not exclusively conceived in this rather pessimistic

vein. His temperament lacked gaiety, as he knew, and rural life only admits, by way of reaction from its normal condition of hardship and struggle, of the uproarious pleasures of the tavern, where the rustic abdicates all his dignity as a man. Millet realised that he had not the soul of a Teniers or an Ostade; but his gravity was occasionally illumined by a smile. Indeed at times when he enjoyed a certain comfort and freedom from the carking cares of existence, he loved to paint, as pendants to his great pictures of labour and sorrow, peaceful studies of country life instinct with the poetry that springs from a sense of duty accomplished. They depict very commonplace actions—a man wheeling a load of dung, peasants with a handbarrow carrying *A new-born Calf*. Later, he painted *The Pig-Killers*, a winter incident, perfectly familiar to every countryman, but elevated by a certain touch of tragic horror. But the further he progresses in his work, the more he comes under peaceful, gentle influences, and the more tenderly does his sympathy go out to women and children and the austere yet gentle atmosphere of the poor man's hearth. His great rustic epic is in a special sense, we may say, the hymn of praise of the rustic housewife. He delights to follow her in all her familiar tasks, and here no doubt his general outlook is intensified by a more subjective element of tenderness and gratitude to the brave-hearted women who watched over his childhood and the gallant helpmate who directs the household she maintains by her daily toil.

Women's work in the fields was glorified more especially in the *Glaneuses* (The Gleaners), one of the gems of the Louvre. It is one of the master's strongest and most eloquent works. Three poor women, their heads bound with blue or pink kerchiefs, their coarse dresses clinging in straight, plain folds about their limbs, stoop to pick up the ears of corn left behind by the reapers; the figures stand out sharply against the sky in sculpturesque relief. In the background harvesters are loading huge waggons, heaped high with the corn-sheaves, while all around the atmosphere is blanched, so to speak, with the intensity of heat, saturated with vaporous emanations enveloping the austere Michelangesque figures in the vibrant air.

Then we have his studies of home-life: women carding wool, spinning or knitting, sewing or darning, on long winter evenings by the yellow lamplight; a little girl sweeping the threshold; a young woman going with her buckets to the well, or lingering by a willow to take breath or dream in the bright spring sunshine on her way back from fetching water

at the river; washerwomen displaying their vigorous statuesque forms in outline against the evening sky, or pouring the boiling linen into the washtub with one of those bold, Sibylline gestures only to be seen in active life; a dairymaid churning, a housewife watching the pot boil, a farmer's wife feeding her hens or ducklings under the blossoming apple-trees—there is no single act of the peasant-woman's life, or, broadly speaking, of woman's life, which Millet has not illustrated.

But he is stirred to yet more reverent tenderness when he portrays her in the part of mother. Exquisitely simple are *La Becquée* (Feeding-time) in the Lille Museum, and Motherly Solicitude in the Thomy Thiéry Collection in the Louvre; touching in their unaffected charm The Happy Family, The First Steps, The Soup, Bedtime, the Sick Child, Giving Alms, and the admirable and pathetic A Knitting Lesson, the pride of the Staats Forbes Collection, which includes nearly all the choicest examples above named—all express in the highest degree the ardent, earnest sympathy the great painter feels for mothers and their little ones.

Again, among all these rustic figures, of men and still more of women, there is one in particular which has fascinated him—that of the Shepherd or the Shepherdess. In all this primitive world the shepherd seems still more primitive. The same contemplative spirit animates him which animated our most remote ancestors. He is still, as in days of yore, culler of simples, bone-setter, flute-player, seer, and wizard more or less. He is mysterious to his fellows; and even more so to the poet, in whose eyes he is meditation and solitude personified. Millet understood him as no one else did, and has immortalised him in haunting conceptions. Here the Shepherd stands erect amid his flock, his slouched hat pressed down over his eyes, his long body amplified by his rough cloak, leaning on his staff, his grand and enigmatic figure outlined against the golden sky; there he heads his little army of sheep beneath the glorious sunlight or the fantastic moonshine. Millet sees it all and reproduces it all in pictures that are amongst the most fascinating productions of his brush. As for the Shepherdess, he made a type of her so sincere, so charming and so sylvan that his very detractors were disarmed. His "Shepherdess with her Flock" was acclaimed a masterpiece, and the State hastened—as usual, too late—to offer to acquire it from the artist, who had already sold it. Again we see her, on the outskirts of a wood, keeping her sheep, or returning at evening from the pastures while her



watchful dog makes sure that none of the flock goes astray ; or she is sitting under a flowering elder-bush, her *sabots* crossed, her knotted staff beside her, dreaming over her coarse knitting ; or he shows her holding in her tender arms the newly dropped lamb, followed by its bleating mother ; or she stands watching with some companion a flight of migratory birds on the wing. It even seems as if a passing memory of earlier days, the days when he used to surprise dryads and satyrs lurking in the woods, had inspired his brush for a moment when he painted that exquisite figure, at once rustic and antique, beautiful as a statue, voluptuous yet chaste, the figure of the little Goose-girl, bathing with her cackling charges in the cool waters of a shady river-pool.

In this grandiose harmony which unites nature with mankind, nature plays her part as a vast and magnificent accompaniment. But the further Millet advanced along the path of life, the more susceptible he became to the inherent beauties of landscape—so much so that very often he devotes his attention solely to his beloved fields. His last visits to Gréville and Gruchy, for instance, turned his thoughts to them more fondly than ever. There are so many recollections he would fain carry away with him from “these fields that now belong to strangers.” He makes haste to paint divers aspects of his native countryside, feeling, now that he is approaching the end of his life, that he is “more and more closely attached to it.” “Oh ! let me say once more, I am the man my native place has made me !” he cries. To this inspiration we owe a corner of the village of Gréville, his *Cliffs near Gruchy* and the little *Church of Gréville*, with its humble steeple, its low-roofed nave and its unpretending churchyard rudely enclosed with coarse masonry. He feels the pathos of this humble, old-fashioned aspect of things, this “simple, homely look,” he says, “as of the world old Breughel painted.” For he saw his landscapes with the eyes of a Primitive ; he finds in them “many aspects of olden times,” and thinks that many a village of his native Normandy recalls those “we see represented in old tapestries.” In some of his pen or pencil drawings, heightened with coloured chalks or a few incisive splashes of water-colour, he seems to have been thinking of Albert Dürer’s notes of travel.

From his first settlement at Barbizon, Millet was filled with a passionate love for the Forest, the great Forest which his fancy delighted to people with an intense life of its own, dreaming of all the simple, primitive

beings that dwelt in it, and understanding their mysterious language, the source of supernatural terrors to man. But he seems to have left to his great comrade Rousseau the task of interpreting the splendour and mystery of the forest trees. The neighbourhood of the Forest is never more than suggested in his pictures; he shows us its outskirts only. His dealings with the sea are very different; not only does he love the sea, but he penetrates its meaning as few can; it is a friend of his childhood. When in later life he returned to its shores, he made pictures of it in which the sentiment of the threefold solitude of sky and earth and ocean was rendered with such power that Théophile Silvestre could say, in language of lyric fervour, "it is no composition, but an outpouring of the spirit; it is all space, light, soul . . . ;" it is a painted psalm."

In other words, Millet was no mere descriptive painter. He enters just as profoundly into the sentiment of natural objects as into the soul of man, and models his landscape with the same masterly unity of conception as his figures. He strives to disengage the shapes of things in space; indeed it almost seems as if it were space itself he seeks to paint. He declares: "I see in the first instance two things only—sky and earth, separated by the horizon; then imaginary lines, rising or falling. I build my design on these essentials; all the rest is merely accident or episode." And, indeed, his purpose was to make men feel "the emotion of lonely places, the mysterious poetry of harmonious or tragic skies." "I would wish," he writes again, "to make those who look at my pictures feel what I know—the terrors and splendours of night. One ought to be able to suggest the songs and silences and rustlings of the air. We must think of the infinite." He would even have the very cackling of his geese "resound in space." "Oh! life," he cries, "the life of universal nature!" in words that sum up his ideal as a landscape painter.

In this grand naturalistic work there are two exceptional pages that seem to form, as it were, the two principal parts of a magnificent symphony to Nature. Nor is this musical metaphor a mere idle conceit in this connection; for there is only one name that can fittingly be spoken together with his as a master of orchestration, the name of Beethoven.

The first is *L'Hiver* (Winter); a vast expanse of barren land under a grey sky rises to a horizon on which is shadowed the vague outline of a belfry,

showing above a confused mass representing a village. In the distance is a plough abandoned in the furrows, and in the foreground a harrow lies as if forgotten, its teeth still imbedded in the wet clods, while a great flight of crows hovers in the air before settling on the broken ground. It is a poignant reflection of the sadness of the deserted fields, and the solitude of the earth's winter sleep.

To counterbalance this we have the companion picture, *Le Printemps* (Spring). This is like some strange fairy scene. A field with a deeply rutted cart-track running across it, bordered by a few apple or cherry trees in blossom; in the background, closing the horizon, a tall mass of trees against the sky. But, simple as the *motif* is, all the gracious charm of springtime is there and all the tragic splendour of storm. Anguish and terror are still in the air, yet the charm of returning peace is already felt; the heavy, lowering clouds are rolling away, while the rainbow throws its glorious arch of many colours across the brilliant scene, where the distant trees, illumined as by a supernatural light, stand out as if bathed in the gold of the sky behind. There is an element of the miraculous, of the fantastic; but the fairylike is the dominant note—the fairylike beauty Nature offers to eyes that can see. And Millet knows how to give us back the eyes of childhood; we may recover from him the candid outlook and simple wonder of our earliest years. It is the marvellous underlying plain reality, the unrealised loveliness of everyday sights, made visible by the power of truth. Everything is there, the dripping trees flashing back the light, the ruffled daisies and buttercups beside the gleaming pools, the hollies bent and bowed by the storm, the apple blossoms refreshed by the rain, re-opening their petals, like little rosy flames.

Millet's work then constitutes a great rustic cycle. It is at once the peasant's epopee and a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Earth, a grandiose poem, by turns bucolic, lyric, pathetic, and even tragic, to the eternal forces of Nature and to man's handiwork.

For this great contemplative soul was the first to realise the combination of the two elements which compose the whole Universe for our comprehension, Nature and Man—Nature, immense, unmeasured and immeasurable, of which we can penetrate but a fragment; Man, himself but an infinitesimal atom of Nature, yet in some sort the equal of the universal whole, because he bears within him the unfathomable mystery of consciousness and of suffering.



In vain was this unity sought by his predecessors; at best it was divined by Delacroix, who introduces Nature in the magnificent score of his observations as symphonic accompaniment to the part played by Man, seeking to admit us, by the magic of this tumultuous and passionate music, to the vast unknown of the human soul. Millet was the first to grasp the mysterious law of their mutual relations. Nature is henceforth neither an isolated entity, indifferent to the doings of Man, nor a mere decorative accessory, remote and superficial; while, on the other hand, Man ceases to be a sort of lay-figure to fill in landscape. Millet was the first, in his esoteric pantheism, who felt what he used to call "*la vie de l'ensemble*"—the life of the Universe as a whole—and to express the unity of the two great elements, Nature and Man, in one sad and solemn harmony.

Brought face to face with Nature, he lavished all the resources of his mind in enthusiastic, reverent and attentive scrutiny, seeking to discover the mighty mystery of her workings and read the lesson of her laws. Face to face with Man, he drew upon the inward treasure-house of his brotherly sympathy, mingling, despite himself, his subjective personality with his independent observations. Thus he ranges from the most subtle distinctions of analysis to the most eloquent combinations of synthesis. He paints as true a picture of the peasant and the field as of the earth and man. The fact is that in his eyes the peasant, as his friend Sensier justly observed, "is the whole human family"—his existence being in close connection with natural laws, he has retained much that is primary and universal; he is more in conformity with the *type* which Millet's mind conceived. For rustic life and pastoral life present permanent characteristics from age to age. On the other hand, the fields in their limitless expanse—that "expanse," he says, "which has so often set me dreaming"—represent for him a fragment of this poor little globe that rolls man's destinies through the skies.

Millet, then, was the first painter to insist on the relation of man to the planet he inhabits, and that of the planet to the immensity of the Universe. None before him had set these forth in their common humility as in their common grandeur. With what touching truthfulness he determines the lowly place man holds in creation, his vocation of toil and struggle and renewed effort; with what courage he speaks of "the distressing but inevitable condition of human existence—fatigue," and "the chief virtue of the peasant—resignation." But though he recognises his wretched

and precarious lot, Millet exalts the simple dignity of the peasant's life, the eternal nobility of his work, nay, even his personal and essential beauty—a rugged beauty, blunt in outline and uncouth in form, but yet so expressive that it affects us more powerfully than all the graces of plastic art.

Millet indeed has given us a definition of the beautiful, not to be found in the manuals of æsthetics. "Everything is beautiful," he says, "provided it occurs in its proper time and proper place. Nothing can be beautiful coming out of the season." "Beauty," he declares again, "is fitness."

Thus, without wasting a thought on theses and theories, doctrines and platforms, day-dreams of philanthropists and agitations of social reformers, without going outside himself at all, the little Gruchy farm-lad, whose mind had been awakened by two or three noble lines of Virgil, arrived by natural process at the formula of these purely modern sentiments—respect for poverty, sympathy for lowly conditions, admiration for the grandeur and beauty of labour; in a word, he has given the highest expression to that noble dream of human brotherhood which was haunting all generous souls.

Can we therefore describe Millet as a *realist*, if we must have one word to sum up a man? Yes, he is a realist perhaps, but he is much more. His realism was not of the same stuff as the propagandist, doctrinaire realism of those about him. He was more concerned with general truths than with precise exactitude, with harmony of tones than with scrupulous fidelity in reproduction. Yet, throughout his work, we shall never find a Gruchy peasant set in a Barbizon landscape; we shall always see the heavenly bodies occupying their proper place in the skies, according to the hour or the season, the trees suitable to the soils where they grow, the branches pointing as the prevalent winds have bent them. The peasant that was in him could never be guilty of such flagrant blunders on the most elementary points as we see committed by the professional artists of our exhibitions.

"We must," he writes in fine, sententious phrase, "we must be able to make the trivial express the sublime; there lies its true power." Again he says, "things exist only in virtue of the substance they contain," or again elsewhere, "there can be no production but where there is expression." In fact a valuable collection might be made of the maxims, vigorous and clear-cut as medals, which might be selected from his letters. He is not a

realist then; his truth is of a much higher order. He is a seer. He ennobles whatever he touches not by amplification but by simplification. He looks only for the essential, he regards things, as he says himself, only "in their fundamental aspects." Nay, his truth is of so lofty a kind that it goes beyond the mere reproduction of the appearances and activities of reality, that his figures wear the guise of symbols, and his smallest accessories—like the harrow left alone and forgotten on the cold ground, in the middle of a bare field, under the wintry sky—carry an extraordinary importance of meaning.

Nor is Millet a devotee of technique, a virtuoso skilled in the mechanical tricks of the trade. He never allows himself to be harassed by obsessions such as those which distracted his great forerunner, Decamps. By a cruel irony, the latter, haunted by his chronic nightmare of some new alchemy of the palette, was so bewitched by the spontaneous methods of his brother artist that he went one day to surprise him, half surreptitiously, in his lonely retreat at Barbizon. From the day he devoted himself wholeheartedly to his rustic subjects, Millet forgot all his earlier studio-devices. Painting was henceforth for him simply a means of expression which he strove to make the submissive slave of his thought. It was a subject on which he often pondered, less in connection with his own practice than with what he saw others doing. "Alas for the artist who exhibits his talent before his work!" he exclaimed; and he expatiated often on the error of painters who, he says, using a word borrowed from Montaigne, "instead of naturalising Art, artificialise (*artialiser*) Nature." Millet's line, in fact, became more and more virile and austere, a kind of handwriting in which all may read his thought. And it was, as a matter of fact, precisely this thought itself, this grandiose mirage of reality, which struck his contemporaries—so much so that, as is generally known, his drawings were, and still are, more eagerly sought after than his pictures.

To sum up, a great religious and mystic emanation rose from Millet's work, to hover over the remaining years of the century. In its single-minded and ingenuous simplicity this work will have carried more conviction than all the writings of Fourier, Proudhon and Auguste Comte. It has enriched the artistic consciousness of our time and opened a way, heretofore unexplored, to future ages. So, between Corot and Courbet, who died almost at the same time as himself, and whose work, like his, only took on its proper importance on the morrow, Millet presides over the transformation



of modern art. The results of his painstaking scrutiny of Nature, in particular of his scrupulous observation of the varied play of light, in its normal or indirect effects, as vibrations of aerial masses, combined with Corot's subtle studies of atmosphere to prepare the way for Impressionism, which sprang from the ranks of the realists grouped round Courbet.

But Millet's great achievement was his vital apprehension of man and man's labour. He made the cry of earth audible, to quote an admirable phrase. In virtue of this gift the mightiest magicians of our age join hands with him—Puvis de Chavannes, Cazin, Constantin Meunier. A melancholy and meditative Nazarene, he proclaimed in art a gospel we should call new were it not that of all the great visionaries who have served as guides to humanity. He learned the old truth, which should never be forgotten, that none can touch others unless he is touched himself. Further, that a man must be the man of his work, that reasoning and exposition alone will never convince, and that the great secret we must learn before we can reach the hearts of men is summed up in the simple words—to feel, to love.

GREVILLE 179



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JFM



PEASANT WOMAN PASTURING HER COW,  
BARBIZON 1852





THE HISTORY OF THE  
CITY OF LONDON







THE GLAYERS











THE GLIANTERS











YOUNG MOTHER NURSING HER BABY





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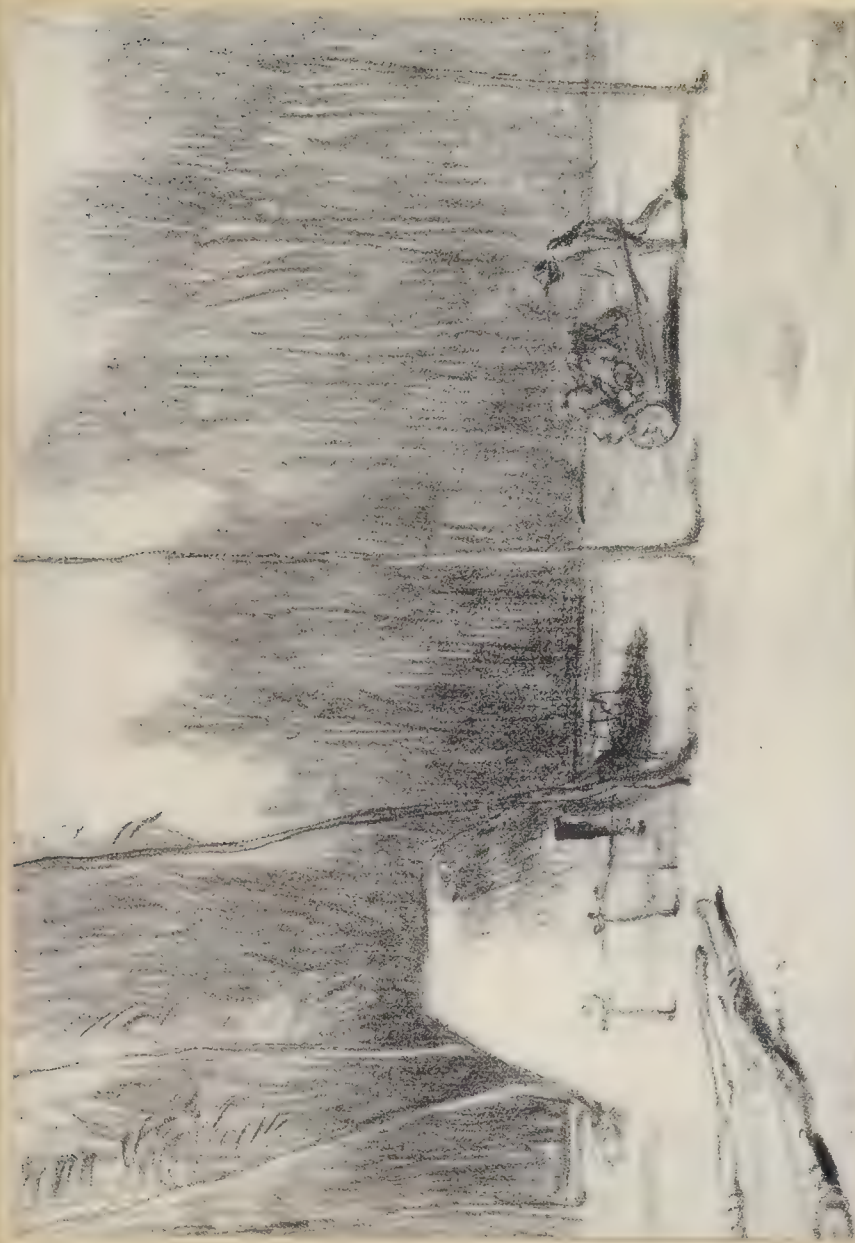




A CHARCOAL-BURNER'S HUT  
WINTER SCENE









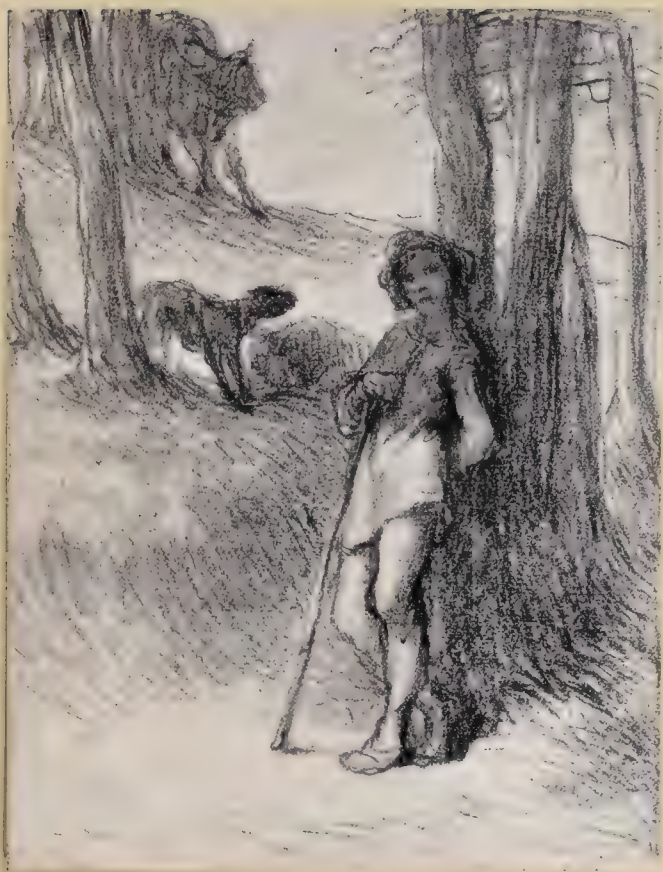


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THE GARDEN OF THE  
LORD OF THE MANOR













THE KNITTING-LESSON











THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY'S









J.F. Millet



GOING TO THE FIELDS











STUDY FOR "WOMEN SEWING"





















THE SEAWEED GATHERERS











THE VIGIL











CLIFFS NEAR GREVILLE



10. 10. 10. 10. 10.







THE GREAT WORK











PLASANT GIRL SEATED ASIDE











STUDY AT BARBIZON

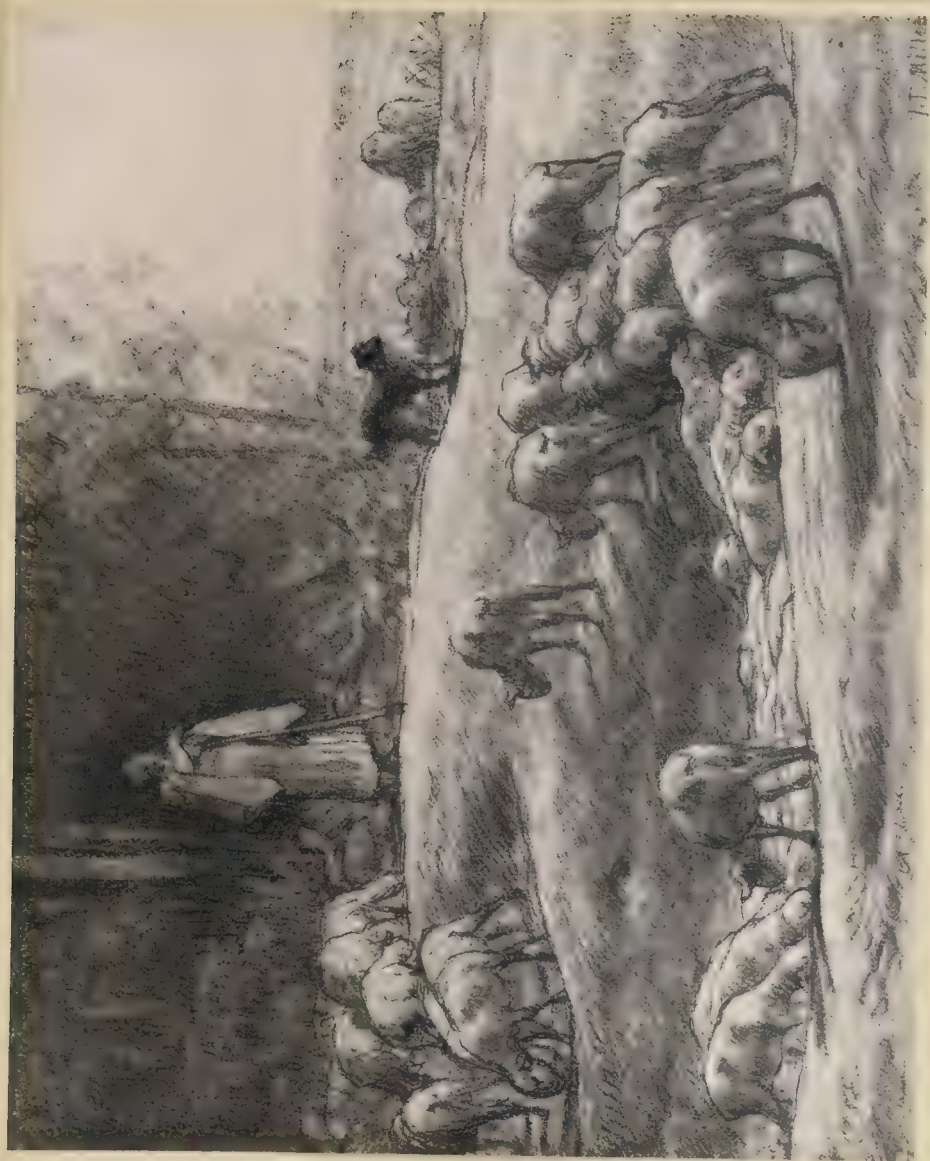


THE END OF THE WORLD





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J.F.A.





THE DUTCH

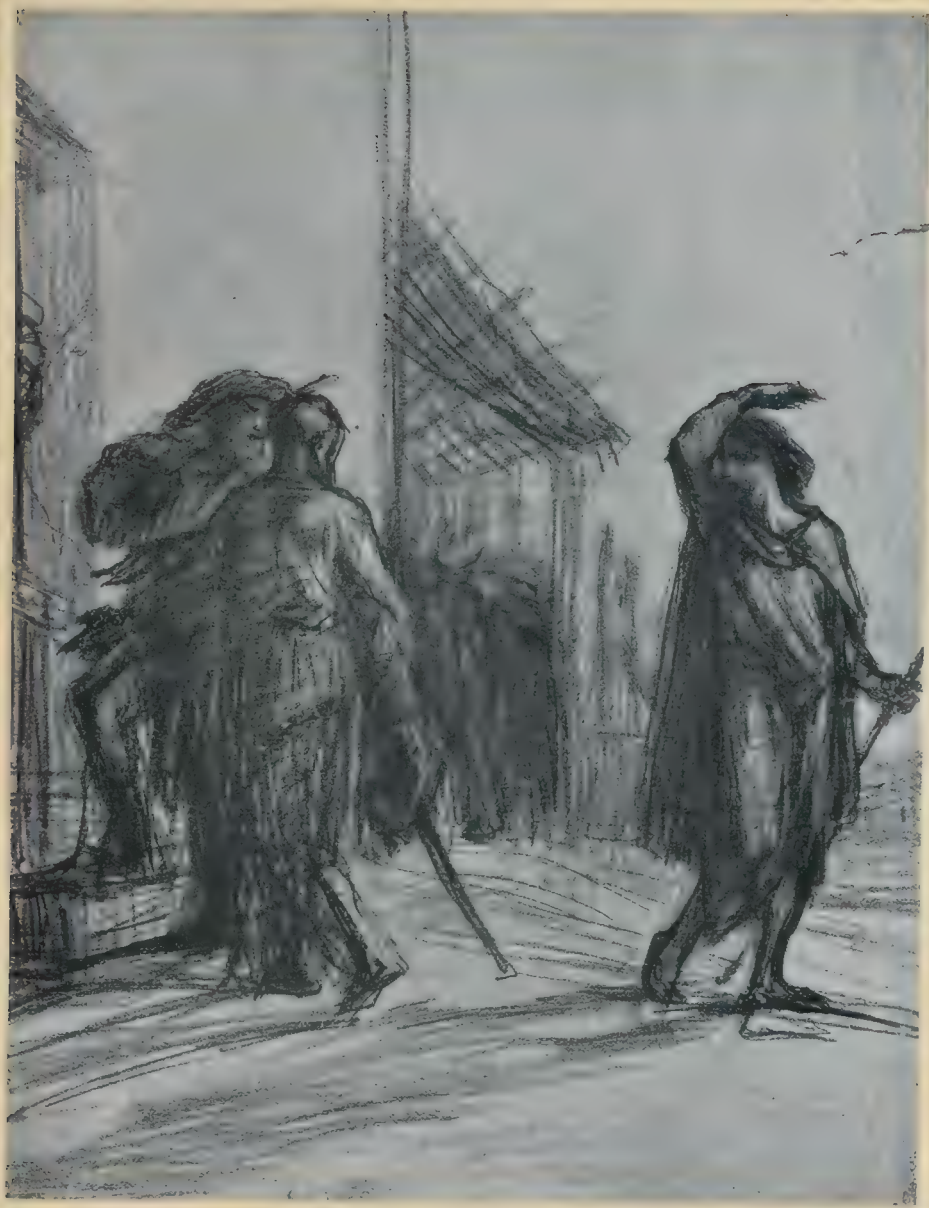
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THE SCOTTISH











STUDY FOR ALLEGORY





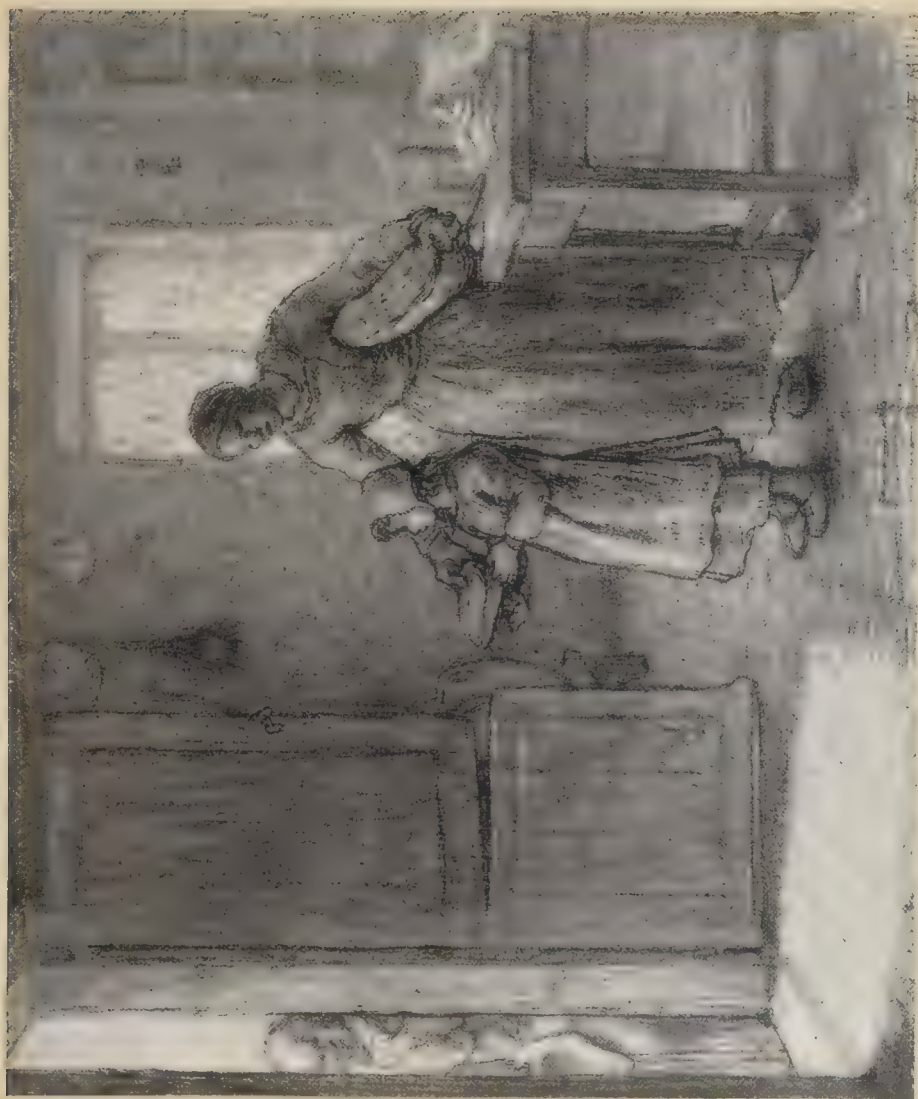
















L. E. NEW BORN CALL











SHEEP-SHEARING

*Study for the Picture*











THE LOSTON FAMILY







J. L. A. 1841















STUDY OF FOREST TREES, THE EDGE  
OF THE WOOD



THE HISTORY OF THE  
CITY OF BOSTON







THE SOWER



THE SOWER







THE SHEAF BINDERS



1872-1873







THE SHEEP-SHEARERS

*Study for the Picture*











WOMAN CARVING WOOD







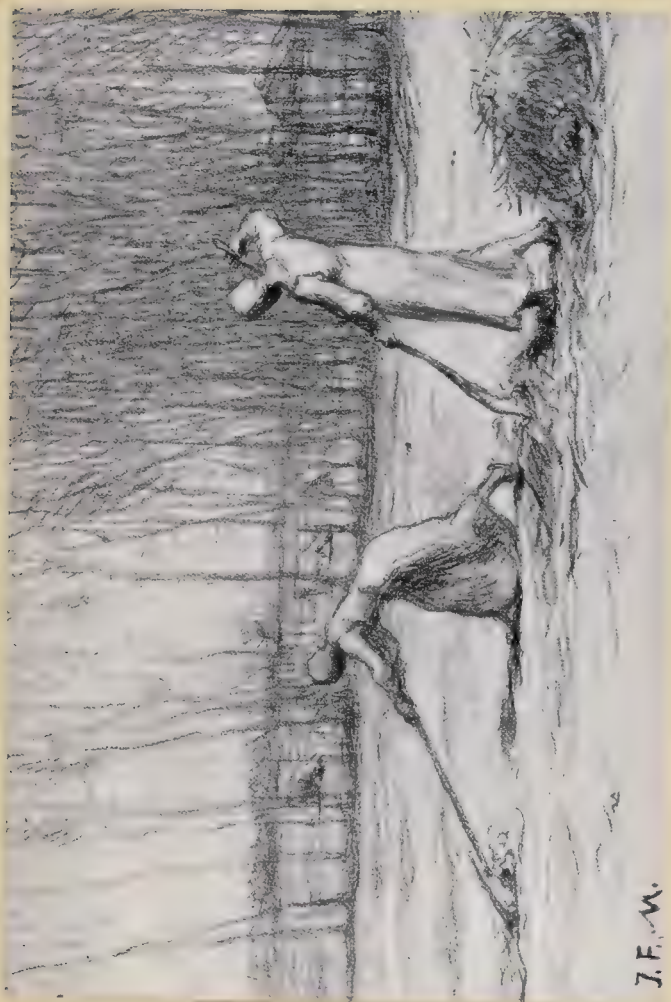




THE TWO HAYMAKERS











THE STONE HEWER











PLASANT WOMAN SEATED











STUDY OF FOREST SCENERY





















STUDY OF MADAME MILLET







37. M. H. 1

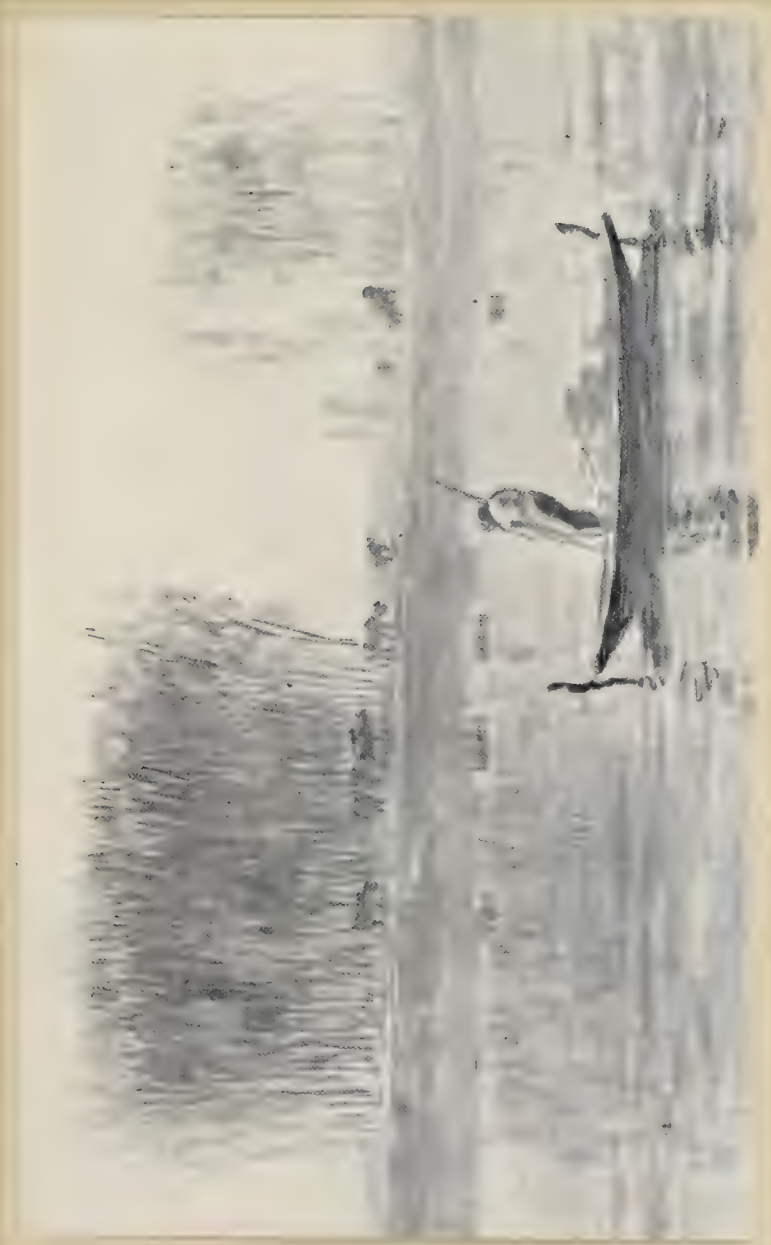




THE RIVER











THE SILENT WOMAN





















GIRL SWEEPING







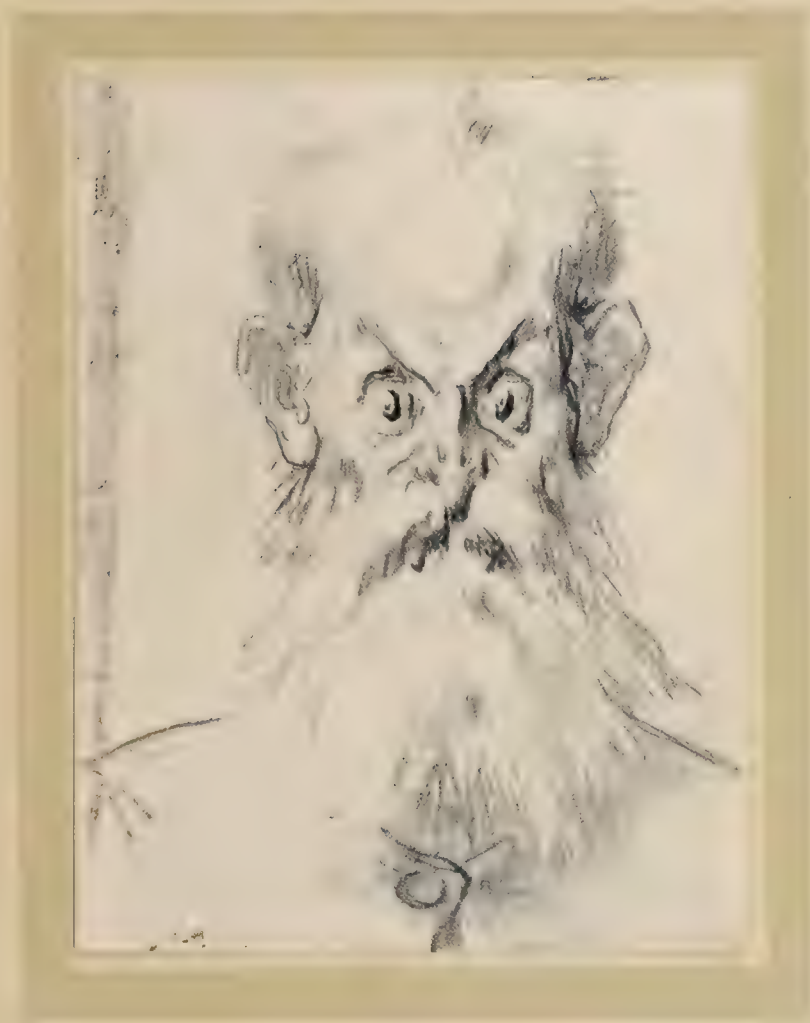
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WOMAN KNITTING





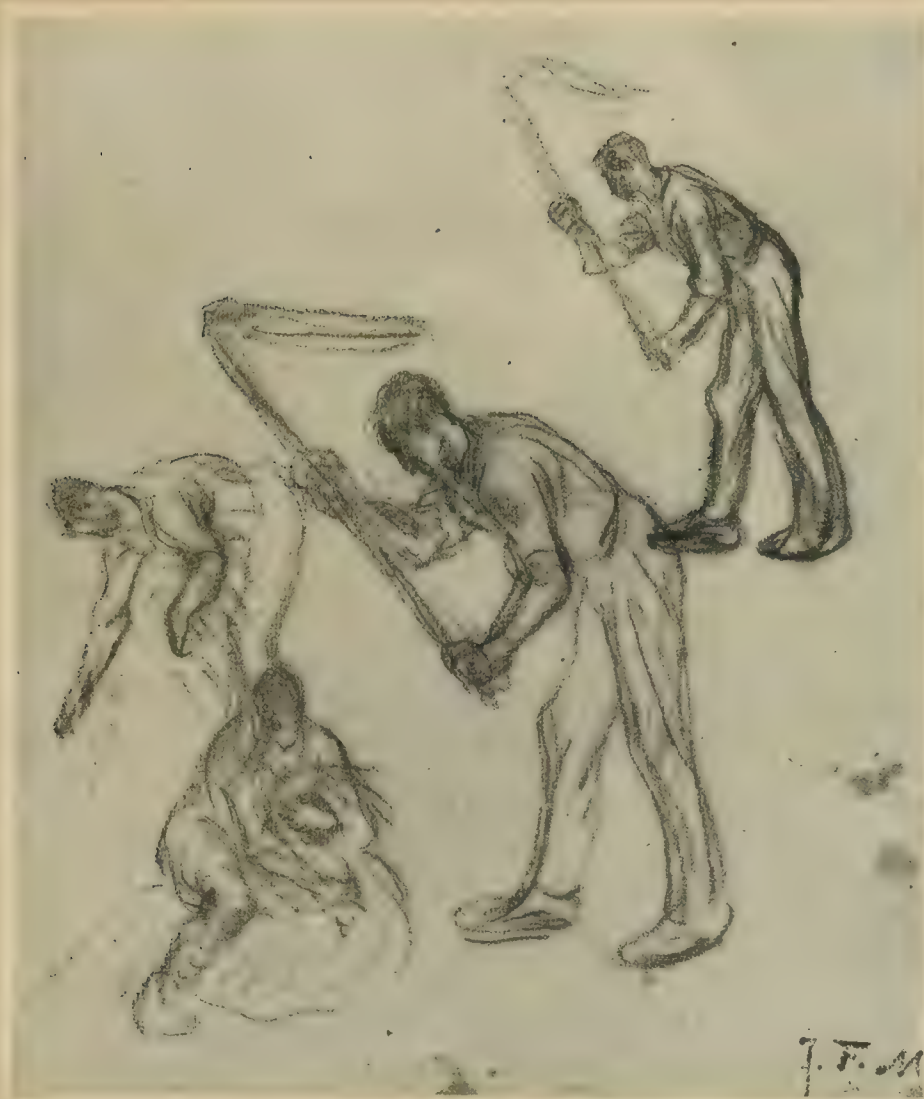










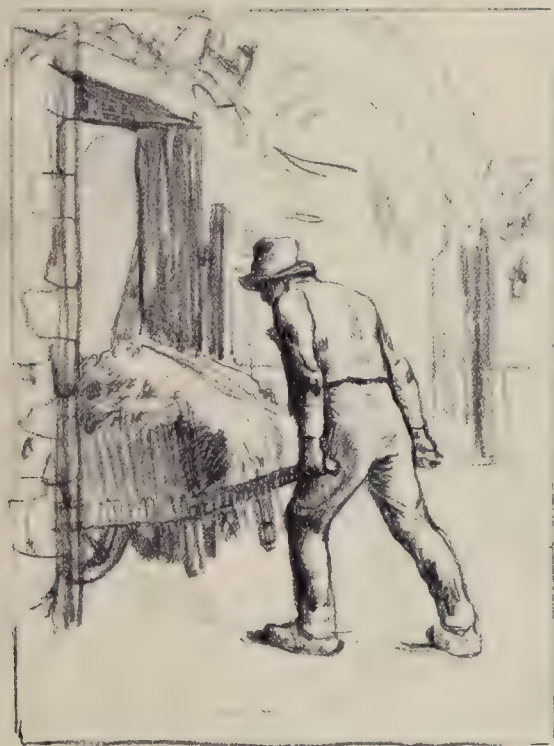






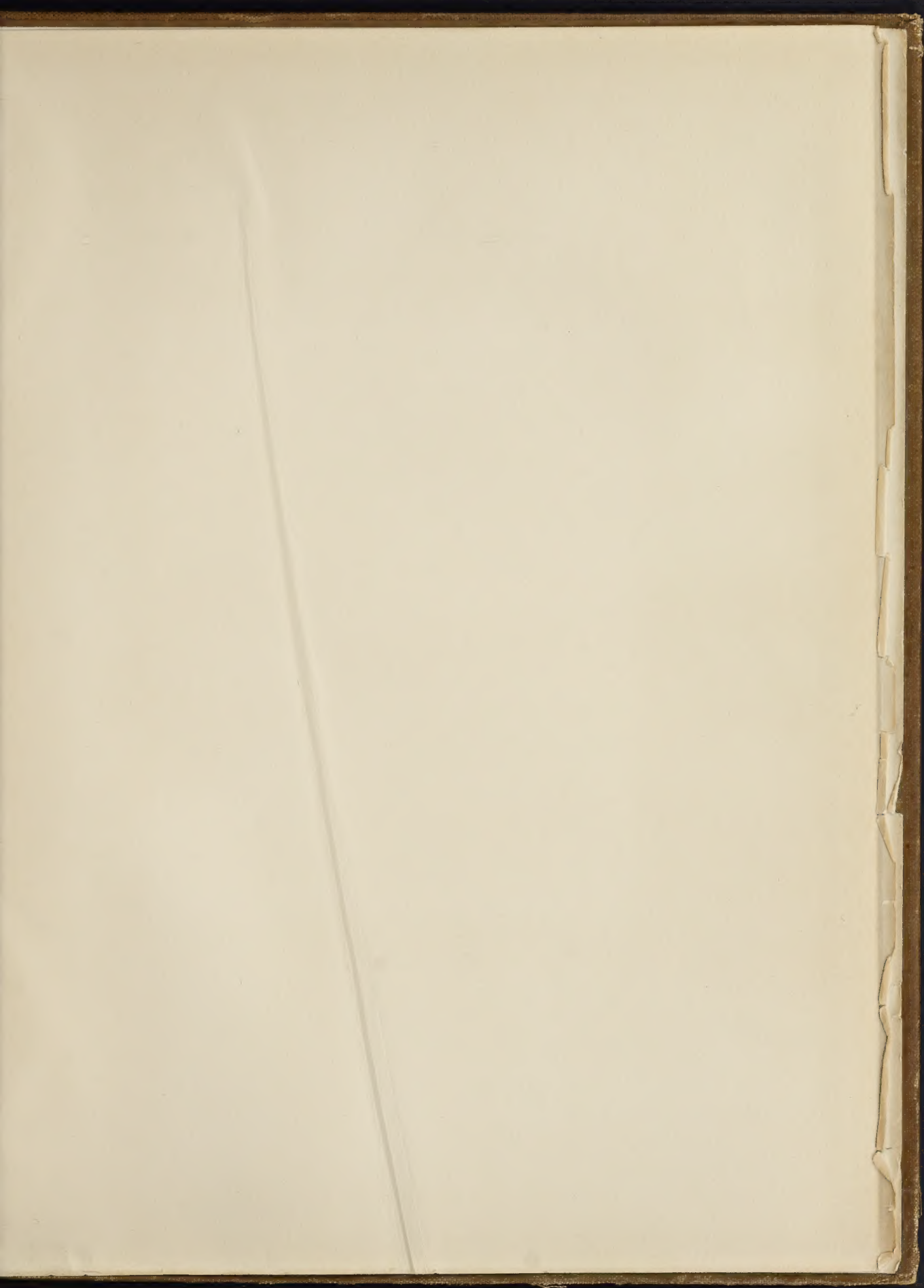












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